NATION

Shameful: SC raps cops in minor's rape probe

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Investors get richer by ₹ 15.80L cr as mkts surge

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SPORTS

Salah to draw curtains on glorious Liverpool stint

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Centre clears Rs 28,840 cr UDAN scheme

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Seeking to revamp the regional air connectivity, Union Cabinet on Wednesday cleared a modified UDAN scheme with an outlay of Rs 28,840 crore for ten years that will provide funds for developing airports, related operations and maintenance activities, helipads and support for acquisition of India-made aircraft. Airlines will be provided Viability Gap Funding (VGF) estimated to be Rs 10,043 crore over the ten-year period starting from FY 2026-27 for operating UDAN routes. , Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that under the modified scheme, 100 airports would be developed from existing unserved airstrips.—*PTI*

In a 1st, India test fires 3D printed rocket engines

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Chennai-based space start-up Agnikul Cosmos has successfully tested its 3D-printed booster engine, 'Agnite', marking a step forward in rapid rocket manufacturing. Co-founder Srinath Ravichandran said the metre-high, single-piece engine can be printed within a week, unlike conventional engines that take months. It uses electric motor-driven pumps, enabling precise thrust control via in-house algorithms. Made of high-temperature-resistant inconel, Agnite demonstrates that large 3D-printed components can function in extreme conditions. The company now plans to scale up production. —*PTI*

Meta fined $375M for misleading users over child safety

SANTA FE, 25 MARCH

A New Mexico jury on Tuesday found Meta liable for $375 million in civil damages after ruling the company failed to protect children on Facebook and Instagram from predators. The 2023 lawsuit, filed by Attorney General Raúl Torrez, alleged Meta misled users and violated state consumer protection laws, following an undercover operation with a fake profile of a 13-year-old girl. Meta said it will appeal. Torrez called the verdict a "historic victory for children," while the next trial phase will decide if Meta created a public nuisance and must fund programs or change app design to better safeguard minors. —*PTI*

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SC grants relief to Sameer Wankhede in cruise case

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted interim relief to IRS officer Sameer Wankhede in his plea challenging disciplinary proceedings related to the 2021 Cordelia cruise drug bust. Wankhede had approached the court after the Delhi High Court set aside a CAT order quashing a chargesheet issued by the CBIC in August 2025. The chargesheet alleged Wankhede sought confidential information from NCB legal adviser Japan Babu post-tenure and attempted to influence the investigation. Senior advocate P S Patwalia argued it was issued to deny him promotion and involved procedural irregularities, including a delayed inquiry officer appointment. —*PTI*

We are not a 'broker' nation like Pak: Govt

At all-party meet, govt says no petrol shortage

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has conveyed to US President Donald Trump that the war in West Asia must end soon as it is hurting everyone, the government told Opposition at an all-party meeting on Wednesday, terming Pakistan a "dalaal" (broker) nation in reference to its reported mediation in the conflict.

There is nothing new in Pakistan's mediation efforts as the country has been "used" by the US since 1981, sources quoted External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar as saying. The government rejected Opposition charges that New Delhi was silent.

On Iran, the government said the foreign secretary had immediately visited the embassy and signed the condolence book following the death of the Supreme Leader, countering allegations of moral weakness.

The Opposition termed the government's responses "unsatisfactory" and demanded a debate in both Houses. Congress leader Tariq Anwar said India appeared a "mute spectator" while Pakistan played mediator. Senior ministers, including Rajnath Singh and Amit Shahattended the two-hour meeting, alongside leaders from several parties.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-26

People queue up at a Hyderabad petrol pump amid rumours of shortage —*PTI*

On the US attack and sinking of an Iranian ship, the government said that had it been in Indian waters it would have been saved but unfortunately the ship was near Sri Lankan waters. "We are good friends with everyone - the US is our largest trading partner, Israel is our largest technological partner and we have good relations with Iran too," it said.

'NO PETROL SHORTAGE'

In a separate advisory, the government urged citizens not to indulge in panic buying of petrol, diesel or LPG, amid reports of crowding at fuel stations triggered by rumours on social media.

It stressed that petrol and diesel stocks are sufficient across the country.

The government also reassured Opposition on fuel supplies in the meeting, stating there is no need for panic. It said India has adequate stocks, has placed advance orders, and diversified sourcing to 41 countries.

Four India-bound petroleum ships have crossed the Strait of Hormuz, five more are expected, while 18 remain stranded in the region. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 4, 5, 6 & 7

4.26 lakh
people have returned from West Asia to India, says MEA

Iran receives 15-point truce proposal from US

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

Iran has received a 15-point plan from Washington seeking to pause the war in West Asia, officials said, as President Donald Trump claimed that Tehran and the US were "in negotiations right now".

Iran, however, appeared to have rejected the proposal, which reportedly includes curbs on its nuclear programme and its missile arsenal and free transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran sent back a five-point counter, which sought reparations for the war damages, an ending the war on all fronts and "sovereignty" over the Strait, which accounted for around a fifth of the world's oil trade.

Pakistan said it was relaying messages between Iran and the US with the aim to help de-escalate the situation.

Notably, both Iran's and the US' proposals are likely unacceptable to the other side. Additionally, Israel, which seeks to continue the war as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seeks to avoid snap elections, was surprised by the US' ceasefire proposal.

Meanwhile, strikes continued across West Asia as dozens more were killed. —*Agencies*

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Govt: Get piped gas if available or risk losing LPG supply

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The government has mandated that household LPG supply will be discontinued if consumers do not switch to piped natural gas (PNG) where available, under a new order aimed at accelerating gas network expansion and reducing reliance on a single fuel.

The move comes amid an LPG shortage caused by disruptions in West Asian supplies. PNG, a domestically produced and diversified fuel, is supplied continuously through pipelines, eliminating the need for cylinder refills. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas issued the Natural Gas and Petroleum Products Distribution Order, 2026, to fast-track pipeline infrastructure, ease approvals, and promote fuel diversification.

Under the order, LPG supply "shall cease after three months" if households do not adopt PNG, except where connection is technically infeasible with a no-objection certificate. The government aims to free LPG for areas lacking pipeline access and strengthen energy security amid global disruptions, including Gulf liquefaction damage and Strait of Hormuz blockages.

The order mandates public authorities to grant right of way or permissions within set timelines, failing which approvals are deemed granted.

In housing complexes, access permissions must be given within three working days, and last-mile PNG connections provided within 48 hours. Designated officers with civil court powers can resolve disputes over land access.

Authorised entities must begin pipeline work within four months of approval or risk penalties, including loss of exclusivity. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board will monitor implementation. Where PNG is not feasible, records must be maintained and LPG supply withdrawn once connectivity becomes operational.

Oil Secretary Neeraj Mittal described the order as turning "a crisis into an opportunity" through ease-of-doing-business reforms, signalling a major step towards modernising India's energy supply. —*PTI*

KARNATAKA GOVT URGES PUBLIC NOT TO PANIC OVER PETROL CRISIS

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The Karnataka government on Wednesday urged people to ignore rumours of petrol and diesel shortages, following reports of panic buying in some areas. Authorities confirmed ample fuel stock nationwide and warned against storing fuel in bottles or cans due to fire hazards. Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner N Sashikumar said social media misinformation triggered long queues, with some images being outdated. He assured the public of sufficient supply, relaxed transport restrictions for fuel vehicles, and warned legal action against those spreading false rumours, urging residents to rely only on official sources.

Parl passes bill to amend law on protection of transgenders

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Parliament on Wednesday passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, which seeks to amend the 2019 Act by excluding social orientations from its ambit and providing graded punishment based on the severity of harm inflicted on transgender individuals. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill on Tuesday, while Rajya Sabha approved it by voice vote, rejecting Opposition demands to send it to a select committee.

Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said the amendment focuses on protecting those facing discrimination due to biological reasons, ensuring continued legal recognition and mainstreaming transgender persons. He highlighted that transgender welfare boards have been set up in over 30 states, adding that the bill brings administrative clarity and safeguards rights.

Opposition MPs, including CPI(M)'s John Brittas and Samajwadi Party's Jaya Amitabh Bachchan, criticised

—FREEPIK

the legislation as exclusionary and rushed, urging its withdrawal or referral to a select committee. Concerns were raised over provisions criminalising the "alluring" of someone to present as transgender, potentially targeting families, doctors, and support networks. IUML's Abdul Wahab, NCP-SCP's Fauzia Khan, and SS-UBT's Priyanka Chaturvedi called for deeper consultation to protect transgender persons from abuse, social ostracisation, and indignity. AAP MP Swati Maliwal stressed that vague provisions could instil fear rather than provide protection, while BJP MP Bhim Singh defended the bill, asserting it strengthens rights. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

SC panel urges withdrawal of Transgender Bill

A Supreme Court-appointed Advisory Committee, chaired by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Asha Menon, has recommended that the government withdraw the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026. The panel noted that key provisions of the Bill contradict the Supreme Court's 2014 National Legal Services Authority verdict, which recognised the right of transgenders to self-identify their gender and affirmed their fundamental rights.. The Committee highlighted violations of privacy in mandatory reporting of gender-affirming care, exclusionary definitions of transgender persons, and redundancy with existing laws. It also called for extensive consultation with the community.

Govt brings in new FCRA bill against religious conversion

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

A bill to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, with the government making it clear that individuals engaging in forced religious conversion through foreign funding will not be spared.

Introducing the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai stated that the legislation aims to enhance transparency and ensure proper utilisation of funds received from abroad.

Countering the opposition's charges that the bill is "dangerous", Rai asserted that it is "indeed dangerous" for those who engage in forced religious conversion using foreign contributions, as well as to individuals who abuse foreign funding for personal gain.

"The Modi government will not tolerate any misutilisation of foreign funding and will take strong action against such elements," he said.

Earlier, opposing the introduction of the legislation, Congress member Manish Tewari said that the bill would give sweeping power to the executive without any constitutional safeguards.

Trinamool Congress member Pratima Mondal, while expressing objection to the bill, said it is "dangerous" and "draconian" as all power is going to be vested with the central government. —*PTI*

MYSURU VARSITY DEFIES GOVT, HOSTS RSS EVENT

MYSURU, 25 MARCH

A three-day lecture series on RSS ideologue Deendayal Upadhyay went ahead at Karnataka State Open University on Wednesday despite its cancellation by the Karnataka government over alleged protocol violations.

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan inaugurated the event virtually, while Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot attended in person. Radhakrishnan highlighted 'Ekatma Manav Darshan' as a framework for harmony, stressing duty-based development, while Gehlot termed it central to India's ethos.

The government had cancelled the event citing lack of prior approval and ongoing probes. Minister MC Sudhakar said universities must remain apolitical. While ordering cancellation, the government on Tuesday also flagged a "serious breach of protocol," noting that the Vice-Chancellor is presiding over the event and that permission was granted to a private organisation even as an inquiry into administrative and financial irregularities at the university is underway.

Sources in the Lok Bhavan said Gehlot had spoken to the KSOU Vice Chancellor in the morning asking him whether the event was still on. "After getting a reply in affirmation, the Governor proceeded to Mysuru," the source told PTI

An RSS office bearer said the minister was not aware about those attending the event and the protocol to be followed. —*Salar News with Agencies*

>>>More on Page 2

TO HELP FASTER DIAGNOSIS

NIMHANS launches India's first mental health database

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

India's first comprehensive repository of data on major psychiatric disorders, CALM-Brain, was launched at NIMHANS on Wednesday.

CALM-Brain will help doctors understand mental illnesses better, leading to faster and more accurate diagnosis. It allows treatments to be personalised, so patients recover more effectively and with fewer side effects. The research can also guide preventive care and future therapies, making mental health support more accessible and effective for everyone.

Developed by neuroscientists in Bengaluru, CALM-Brain is a digital repository containing clinical, neuro-imaging, behavioural, genetic, and other datasets across five disorders: addiction, bipolar disorder, dementia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and schizophrenia.

—FREEPIK

The data, collected longitudinally, tracks brain structure and function in neuropsychiatric diseases and is linked to a biorepository of stem cells for biological research.

CALM-Brain currently contains data from over 2,000 participants from 900 families, addressing limitations of global studies that focus on individuals, single disorders, or Western populations. Researchers can access the dataset to study disease onset, progression, and underlying biological changes, aiming to improve diagnosis and personalised treatments.

- Developed by neuroscientists in Bengaluru, CALM-Brain is a digital repository containing clinical, neuro-imaging, behavioural, genetic, and other datasets across five disorders.

Prof LS Shashidhara said large family-based datasets will accelerate discovery and develop more effective interventions. Prof Biju Viswanath of NIMHANS highlighted the repository's potential to fill the South Asian research gap. According to WHO estimates, India faces a USD 1.03 trillion economic loss due to mental health conditions (2012-2030), with 10.6 per cent of adults affected, according to NIMHANS' 2015-16 survey. —*PTI*

Belagavi bans petrol sale in cans, bottles

BELAGAVI, 25 MARCH

Amid rumours of fuel shortage, authorities in Belagavi have prohibited the sale of petrol and diesel in bottles, cans, or any portable containers at fuel stations across the city.

The ban order was issued by City Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase following reports that motorists, driven by panic, were not only filling their vehicle tanks but also stockpiling fuel in containers.

Officials have warned that such practices of stockpiling fuels could lead to an artificial shortage and also can pose serious risks to public.

All petrol pump owners and staff have been directed to strictly comply with the order failing which will invite legal action, the police warned.

Police and Hoysala patrol vehicles will conduct round-the-clock surveillance across the city, ensuring security at fuel stations and maintaining law and order, the city officials further said.

—Salar News

Woman attacked by her brother, family in City

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

A 59-year-old woman was seriously injured after she was allegedly attacked by her brother and his family over a dispute on Wednesday, police said. The incident occurred around 7am in Ambedkar Nagar in Whitefield, police said. According to the complaint filed at the Adugodi Police Station, Maheswari's younger brother, along with his wife, son, and the son's friends, came to her house and initiated a quarrel over a family dispute. The argument escalated the five attackers allegedly assaulted the woman with a knife and an iron rod. They reportedly also took away her granddaughter, a senior police officer said. The woman was admitted to St John's Hospital for treatment and is in a stable condition. *—PTI*

Two held at KIA with ganja worth Rs 5.79 crore

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Two people were arrested at Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport while attempting to smuggle hydroponic ganja (marijuana) valued at Rs 5.79 crore, upon their arrival from Bangkok on Wednesday. Officials seized 16.54 kg of hydroponic ganja, which was concealed in the checked-in baggage, the Bengaluru Customs said in a post on X. Both the accused were arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Earlier on 17 March, Customs officials at the Bengaluru Airport also disposed of 287.5 kg of ganja (hydroponic weed) and 1.17 kg of Cocaine seized under the NDPS Act, 1985, in accordance with the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) Disposal Manual, officials confirmed in another post. *—PTI*

Girl killed, 4 injured in house collapse

KOLAR, 25 MARCH

A fifteen-year-old girl, Vahinoor, tragically died, and four family members were seriously injured when a portion of their home's wall and roof collapsed early on Wednesday morning at approximately 6am. The house, located in Jahangeer Mohalla within Mulbagal town, is quite old, and local residents believe the structure likely failed due to decades of wear and tear. According to Annaiah, the Circle Inspector of Mulbagal, the head of the family, Suhail Pasha, who runs a local mutton shop, was among the four hurt. All four sustained serious injuries and were rushed to a hospital in Kolar for urgent medical treatment. Suhail later stated that the heavy slabbed roofing allegedly gave way first, triggering the fatal structural collapse. *—Salar News*

B'luru, Hyd fuel half of India's growth momentum: Report

Data says they are outpacing Delhi NCR, Mumbai

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The two southern tech hubs--Bengaluru and Hyderabad--now power over half of India's urban growth momentum, reshaping jobs, consumption, mobility and the future of Indian cities, according to a data report released on Wednesday.

Together, the two cities accounted for about 53 per cent of all Grade A office space added across India's top cities in the last five years, the report said.

The findings are part of "WeAreCity 2026", the second edition of UnboxingBLR's flagship data report on Indian cities, unveiled at the Indiaspora Global AI Summit 2026 here.

Titled "A Tale of Two Cities", UnboxingBLR said in a statement that Bengaluru and Hyderabad are "punching above their weight" and increasingly challenging the economic dominance of Delhi NCR and Greater Mumbai, despite having significantly smaller populations.

"They (Bengaluru and Hyderabad) have contributed nearly 50 per cent of new domestic flight movements among India's top eight cities in just the last two year. In 2024-25, one in every four new companies formed across India's major cities was registered in either Bengaluru or Hyderabad. This is not incremental growth, it is structural momentum," the report stated.

A traffic jam on Anand Rao Circle flyover heading towards Sheshadri Road on Wednesday due to a protest at Freedom Park against the State government's acceptance of the Justice Nagamohan Das Commission report on internal reservation *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

STARTUP CAPITAL VS GCC HUB

Bengaluru continues to lead as India's startup capital, with an edge in funding, innovation output and emerging tech jobs. It also shows higher bank deposits and mutual fund participation, indicating greater disposable income and financial maturity.

Hyderabad, meanwhile, is emerging rapidly as a Global Capability Centre (GCC) hub, narrowing the gap with Bengaluru in enterprise tech jobs. It has recorded faster growth in retail credit and housing loans, signalling a city still building core assets.

SAME COMMUTE TIMES

Office commute times in both cities are nearly identical, averaging 59 minutes one way in Bengaluru and 58 minutes in Hyderabad, with the difference attributed more to distance, planning and infrastructure design, the report stated.

DIFFERENT ECONOMIES

On liveability indicators, Bengaluru residents show higher adoption of the gig economy, side hustles and experiential consumption, while Hyderabad records stronger indicators on infrastructure delivery and safety perceptions, especially for women.

Both cities dominate entry-level hiring across IT, manufacturing, pharma and BFSI sectors, outpacing Delhi and Mumbai combined in several segments, it said.

Speaking at the event, Prashanth Prakash, Chairman and Co-Founder of the Bengaluru-focused collaborative platform UnboxingBLR, said the CIty thrives on dense innovation, while Hyderabad demonstrates how long-term planning and infrastructure-led execution can accelerate scale. He said data shows how cities compete. *—PTI*

Seer Shivarathri Deshikendra Swami, Governor Thawarchand Gehlot and KSOU VC Vice Chancellor Sharanappa V Halse at the event *–SALAR*

Mysuru varsity defies govt, hosts event on RSS

MYSURU, 25 MARCH

Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) on Wednesday disregarded the State government's directive to cancel the conclave commemorating RSS ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya as Vice Chancellor Sharanappa V Halse attended the event at the campus.

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar on Tuesday had cancelled the event on 60 years of Deendayal Upadhyay lectures about Ekatma Manav Darshan, saying that KSOU wasn't following protocol and that universities should be "apolitical". Upadhyay was part of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the precursor to the BJP. The State Higher Education Department also issued a show cause notice to Halse for granting permission for a private programme in a State-run university.

Halse, who replied to the notice, said the university rented the auditorium to the event organisers. University staff and employees are not taking part in the event, he said. However, the varsity allowed the Right-wing organisations to use its logo and name in publicity material.

This government has brought a Bill against hate speech during the Belagavi legislature session, but action has to be taken against the State government (for hate). Such political interference, even in the field of education, is not good for the government

-BY Vijayendra, State BJP President

Halse also welcomed the guests in presence of Governor Thawarchand Gehlot, Suttur Mutt Seer Shivarathri Deshikendra Swamiji. Gehlot highlighted the contributions of Deendhyal Shayamprasad Mukherjee to the nation.

South India Pragna Prahav Chief Pradeep Bharadwaj and Vice President CP Radhakrishna also inaugurated the event virtually.

Mysuru city police have beefed up security at the campus. *—Salar News*

CM Siddaramaiah, DyCM DK Shivakumar, Speaker UT Khader, LOP R Ashoka and MLAs after the Budget Session at Vidhana Soudha *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

Maintained financial discipline: CM defends Budget, says it was 'full pot, not kali chombu'

BELAGAVI, 25 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday defended his 17th State Budget in the Assembly, asserting that the government had maintained fiscal discipline while prioritising welfare and development.

Replying to the debate on the budget that went on for 24 hours and 45 minutes with participation from 50 members, the chief minister said the budget reflects a balance between social justice and economic growth

He dismissed opposition criticism as politically motivated.

"There has been criticism that the government is running on loans. However, our government has borrowed Rs 1.32 lakh crore, and when the budget size is Rs 4,48,004 crore, how can it be called a loan-based budget? Saying that the government is running on loans is far from the truth," he said.

On fiscal concerns, Siddaramaiah said the state aimed for a revenue surplus budget but could not achieve it due to "non-cooperation from the central government."

He noted that the state's total debt stands at Rs 8.24 lakh crore and has been kept within prescribed limits.

Taking a swipe at the Opposition, Siddaramaiah said no matter how much the they criticise, a mango cannot become a neem fruit. Rejecting claims that the Budget was "kali chombu", he asserted that the budget was a "full pot".

He said Rs 1.31 lakh crore had been spent on guarantee schemes so far and stressed that allocations for welfare programmes had been consistent. He also clarified that Rs 600 crore had been earmarked for the 'Yuva Nidhi' scheme and that it had not been discontinued. *—PTI*

MCC presents Budget with outlay of Rs 1,311 cr for 26-27

MYSURU, 25 MARCH

- The 2026-27 financial plan highlights beautification measures, instead of core issues such as infrastructure fixes, parking, garbage disposal systems and city cleanliness

The Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) on Wednesday presented a budget outlay of Rs 1,311.13 crore for the 2026–27 financial year, with an estimated surplus of Rs 10.20 crore. The budget was presented by Regional Commissioner and MCC Administrator Nitesh Patil in the absence of an elected council.

The 2026-27 financial plan highlights beautification measures such as improved footpaths and making the city more people friendly over core urban issues such as infrastructure, parking, garbage disposal and city cleanliness.

This Budget includes implementation of various development works, disbursement of salaries and other expenses.

Among key allocations, Rs 50 lakh has been set aside for a stadium at Kumbarakoppal, and Rs 30 lakh for renovation of the Town Hall. The MCC has earmarked Rs 10 crore for pedestrian-friendly pathways across wards and Rs 30 crore for UGD improvements. Additional funds include Rs 1.10 crore for renovation of Puttaraja Gavai Stadium and Rs 5 crore each for development works in three assembly segments. Notably, the MCC proposes constructing one swimming pools each at Krishnaraja, Chamaraja and Narasimharaja segments. Patil did not mention an increase in tax. *—Salar News*

CHIKKABALLAPUR STUDENTS OBSERVE LEGISLATURE SESSION PROCEEDINGS

C'BALLAPUR, 25 MARCH

An educational tour was organised on Wednesday for postgraduate Political Science students of the Government First Grade College, Chikkaballapur, allowing them to observe the ongoing Legislature Session at Vidhana Soudha.

The objective of the visit was to provide students with a practical understanding of legislative procedures, said college Principal Vasundara.

The students observed both the Assembly and the Council, gaining significant understanding of the question hour, debates, and decision-making processes, said Political Science lecturer Satyanarayana.

Observing proceedings in real life is far more valuable, said another faculty member. *—Salar News*

Cong leader attacked by assailants in Uttara Kannada

UTTARA KANNADA, 25 MARCH

Former Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) secretary Gopalakrishna Nayak sustained injuries after he was allegedly attacked by unidentified assailants in Ankola in Uttara Kannada district on Wednesday morning.

According to Uttara Kannada superintendent of police Deepan MN, the incident occurred near the Kanakaneshwar temple on Karwar Road when Nayak was heading towards his car after stepping out of a salon. The attackers appeared to have been waiting for him and launched the assault as he approached his vehicle.

The assailants had arrived in a Goa-registered car. They reportedly dragged the leader to the ground, beat and kicked him and attempted to stab him with knives. Nayak sustained injuries on his head and hands and is currently undergoing treatment in a private hospital.

Nayak managed to escape from the attackers by rushing into a nearby private financial institution, where he locked himself inside.

Police said the attackers were speaking in Konkani, a language commonly used in Uttara Kannada and neighbouring Goa.

Police are now coordinating with authorities in Goa, including the regional transport office, to trace the vehicle and identify those involved.

Suspects may have been detained near the Goa border, sources said.

The motive behind the attack remains unclear, and an investigation is underway to trace the culprit—*Salar News*

SEASONAL MIGRATION

Migratory birds flock to Chikkaballapur tank

GUDIBANDE, 25 MARCH

A large numbers of migratory birds, including the painted stork, grey heron and cormorant, have been spotted at Amani Byra Sandra tank in Gudibande of Chikkaballapur district.

Tahasildar Sibgath Ulla said the birds, believed to have arrived from North India, have been present at the tank for the past few days. Morning walkers frequently gather along the tank bund to observe the birds.

Spread across about 287 acres, Amani Byra Sandra tank is among the largest water bodies in the district.

A flock of cormorant birds at the Amani Byra Sandra tank *–SALAR*

Local resident B Suresh said the tank has retained water since it filled to capacity two years ago and has been clean since.

Wildlife photographer Mohan Krishna identified the species at the site and noted that such birds migrate seasonally and stay near water bodies with sufficient food before returning to their native habitats after summer.

Both painted stork and grey heron are quite tall in these sizes and can fly for long hours, Sastry said, while cormorant birds are often found in groups, noted environmentalist VSS Sastry. He said that similar bird activity is observed at nearby Veerapura tank.

Ulla said steps would be taken to bring in more aquatic life into the tank to meet the needs of these birds, especially given the presence of fishermen. *—Salar News*

K'taka govt panel to ensure quality palliative care

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The Karnataka government has constituted a State-level technical advisory committee to guide the planning, implementation and monitoring of palliative care services in the state, officials said on Wednesday.

The move follows a proposal that pointed out that palliative care aims to improve the quality of life of patients and their families facing serious and life-limiting illnesses, they said.

The Committee, chaired by Retired IAS officer Dr Raj Kumar Khatri, comprises members from government health departments, leading Bengaluru-based medical institutions, and a representative from NGOs working in palliative care segment, officials said.

A 23 March official order stated the committee would advise the government on preparation, implementation and review of the State Palliative Care Policy and guidelines. It would be responsible for recommending standards, treatment protocols and service delivery models for providing palliative care services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. *—PTI*

—ANI

Sonia to remain in hospital for a few more days

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi will remain under observation at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here for a couple more days, sources said on Wednesday. According to hospital authorities, Gandhi, 79, was admitted at 10.22 pm on Tuesday. Sir Ganga Ram Hospital Chairman Dr Ajay Swaroop said Gandhi's condition is stable and a team of doctors is closely monitoring her health. Doctors are conducting further examinations to check for a possible stomach and urinary tract infection, and antibiotics have been administered as part of the treatment, the hospital said. The sources said Gandhi was unwell, possibly due to a change in the weather. There is no cause for concern and her condition is not serious. —*PTI*

Shankaracharya gets bail in POCSO case

PRAYAGRAJ, 25 MARCH

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday granted anticipatory bail to Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati and his disciple Mukundanand Brahmachari in a case registered against them under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. However, the court restrained both the informant and the applicants from making any media statements regarding the matter. The case pertains to an FIR lodged at the Jhunsi police station in Prayagraj following directions from a POCSO court, alleging sexual exploitation of several 'batuks' (young disciples) by the accused. Saraswati had maintained that the allegations were fabricated. The defence said the seer was falsely implicated, and the alleged victims never stayed at his ashram. —*PTI*

Fugitive Punjab AAP MLA arrested in Gwalior

PATIALA, 25 MARCH

AAP MLA Harmeet Singh Pathanmajra was arrested by the Punjab Police from Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior, more than six months after he escaped police custody in a rape case. Officials on Wednesday said Pathanmajra, the first-time MLA from Sanour in Patiala, was nabbed from Gwalior on late Tuesday night. He was brought back to Patiala, and will be presented before a court here, Senior Superintendent of Police (Patiala) Varun Sharma said. The case was filed based on complaint by a Zirakpur-based woman, who alleged the MLA misrepresented himself as a divorcee, entered into a relationship and later married in 2021 while already being married. —*PTI*

Sexual abuse case filed against Goa councillor's son

PANAJI, 25 MARCH

Two minor girls have come forward to lodge complaints in connection with a case of alleged sexual exploitation in which the son of a Goa BJP councillor has been arrested, police said on Wednesday. The Curchorem police in Goa's Kushavati district on 22 March arrested Soham Naik, 20, son of local councillor Sushant Naik, under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Goa Children's Act for allegedly shooting and circulating obscene videos of girls. The accused has also been booked under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Information Technology Act. The Investigation into the alleged case was handed over to the Crime Branch on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Didi says 8L voters deleted, EC probes glitch

Mamata slams BJP for 'causing misery' to the people by enforcing an 'ill-planned SIR'

KOLKATA/NAXALBARI, 25 MARCH

The Election Commission on Wednesday said it is examining the cause of a technical glitch that briefly showed all voters in West Bengal as "under adjudication". Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee claimed eight lakh names have been deleted in the first list of electors as part of the SIR exercise.

The problem came to light on Tuesday night when voters attempting to access their details on the EC website using their EPIC numbers found their status marked as "under adjudication", even in cases where names were already included in the final electoral rolls.

The glitch occurred less than 24 hours after the EC released the first supplementary list of voters around midnight on Monday.

The development prompted sharp reactions from the ruling TMC, which alleged that the error had effectively put the entire electorate under suspicion.

The glitch occurred less than 24 hours after the EC released the first supplementary list of voters around midnight on Monday —*PTI*

Meanwhile, Banerjee addressing an election rally at Naxalbari in the Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district, slammed the BJP for "causing misery" to the people by enforcing an "ill-planned SIR".

The CM demanded that physical copies of the supplementary list published online be immediately made available so that the information could be verified.

The first supplementary list of 60 lakh-odd names of voters under judicial scrutiny was published by the Election Commission late on Monday night, but the poll body is yet to officially confirm either the total number of adjudicated voters in that list or the deletion figure.

Additionally, senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday claimed that around 79 lakh "fake" names have been removed from the state's electoral rolls during the SIR, and asserted that this would help the BJP secure more than 177 seats in the Assembly elections next month. —*PTI*

BJP fields RG Kar victim's mother

BJP on Wednesday released its third list of 19 candidates for the West Bengal polls, fielding the mother of the RG Kar Medical College rape-murder victim from Panihati. She, a vocal critic of the probe, described contesting as a "painful responsibility" and vowed to work for the constituency while seeking to unseat the ruling TMC. The move aims to channel public outrage over the 2024 incident that sparked statewide protests on women's safety. Other notable candidates include Rathindra Nath Bose (Cooch Behar Dakshin), Chitrajit Roy (Islampur) and Arup Kumar Das (Singur). Madhumita Ghosh will contest from Haripal, while other nominees include Dinesh Sarkar (Raiganj), Haripada Barman (Hemtabad), Amlan Bhaduri (English Bazar), Swapan Das (Shantipur), Dipanjan Kumar Guha (Chandannagar), Harekrishna Bera (Tamluk) and Prankrishna Tapadar (Purbasthali Dakshin). —*PTI*

TMC bagged Muslim votes but did nothing for the community

-Asaduddin Owaisi, AIMIM Chief

Here, there is permission to offer namaz, but to perform pooja and erect pandals, one has to seek permission from the high court

-Nitin Nabin, BJP National President

The EC, BJP and the Centre are not following the Constitution ... Today, they are snatching away voting rights; tomorrow, they will snatch away citizenship by bringing the NRC

-Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister

In 1st list AIADMK fields EPS from Edappadi, 23 aspirants

CHENNAI, 25 MARCH

AIADMK appears to have forged ahead of its political foe, the ruling DMK, by becoming the first party to announce its first list with 23 candidates for 23 April Tamil Nadu Assembly election including General Secretary **Edappadi K Palaniswami**, seeking re-election from Edappadi seat for the sixth time.

At the end of an action-packed three days of hectic campaigning, Palaniswami said he would contest from Edappadi, his home constituency, yet again.

The rival DMK, which has finalised seat-sharing with its allies, is yet to release its manifesto or announce its candidates for the coming polls.

Palaniswami, popularly known as EPS, earlier sprang a surprise by finalising the seat-sharing with major allies viz the BJP, PMK and AMMK on 23 March. He also announced a 297-point election manifesto on Wednesday. He has served as the seventh Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from 2017 to 2021.

KP Munusamy, AIADMK deputy general secretary, has been fielded from Veppanahalli. He has been the Municipal Administration and Rural Development minister in the Jayalalithaa cabinet, and had also been the party's Rajya Sabha MP (2020–2021) before resigning to take his seat in the state assembly after the 2021 elections.

D Jayakumar, a former state minister who has been the TN Assembly Speaker, is contesting from his home constituency, Royapuram in the city from where he was elected in the 1991, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016 elections for five terms.

SP Velumani, currently MLA from Thondamuthur Assembly constituency, has been renominated. The party's Rajya Sabha MP CV Shanmugam has been fielded from Mailam. —*PTI*

Lok Sabha passes Finance Bill 2026

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Finance Bill 2026, along with 32 government amendments.

With the passage of the Finance Bill 2026, the Lok Sabha completed its part of the Budgetary approval process. The Upper House, Rajya Sabha, will now consider the Bill.

After the Rajya Sabha approves the Bill, the Budget process for 2026-27 will be complete.

The Union Budget 2026-27 envisages a total expenditure of Rs 53.47 lakh crore, an increase of 7.7 per cent over the current fiscal ending 31 March.

The total capital expenditure proposed for the next fiscal is Rs 12.2 lakh crore.

It proposes a gross tax revenue collection of Rs 44.04 lakh crore and a gross borrowing of Rs 17.2 lakh crore.

The fiscal deficit for FY27 is projected at 4.3 per cent of GDP, lower than 4.4 per cent in the current fiscal.

Additionally, Parliament is likely to complete the budget exercise for 2026-27 by approving the Finance Bill 2026 on Friday.

Opposition leaders stage a protest agaisnt LPG shortage during Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday —*PTI*

The Finance Bill, will be taken up for consideration in the Upper House on Friday, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said.

He was informing Rajya Sabha members about the business schedule for the next three to four days.

Congress member Jairam Ramesh asked Rijiju to inform the House about the government's agenda for the coming three to four days. —*PTI*

'3 cr fake accounts deleted on IRCTC site'

More than three crore fake accounts from the IRCTC portal have been removed as part of efforts to deal with touts selling train tickets and around 78 per cent of the seats in trains are in the non-AC categories, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Presiding officer takes part in Question Hour

On a rare occasion in parliamentary proceedings when the presiding officer, Telugu Desam Party leader Krishna Prasad Tenneti, himself raised a query during the Question Hour in Lok Sabha on Wednesday. "The next question is in my name. If you wish, you can reply," he told. —*PTI*

'Umbrella law' for CAPFs to regulate service rules

An "umbrella law" introduced by the Union government on Wednesday for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) will regulate recruitment, deputation, promotion, and other conditions of service for their officers. The rules under these Acts govern the recruitment and conditions of service for Group A General Duty Officers and other officers and members in the CAPFs. —*PTI*

Kerala polls: RaGa alleges 'LDF-BJP collusion'

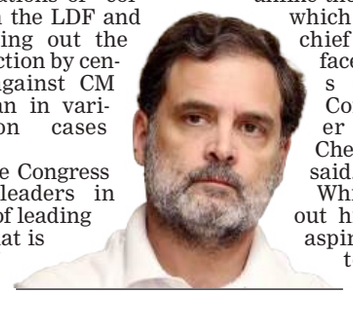
KOZHIKODE/ ALAPPUZHA/KOTTAYAM, 25 MARCH

BJP will not be able to open an account in Kerala and the UDF's proposed welfare guarantees, similar to those made in Karnataka and Telangana, will prove successful in the southern state also.

-KC Venugopal, Congress general secretary

Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday stepped up the Congress campaign in poll-bound Kerala by escalating allegations of "collusion" between the LDF and the BJP, pointing out the alleged lack of action by central agencies against CM Pinarayi Vijayan in various corruption cases against him.

Meanwhile, the Congress has a dozen leaders in Kerala capable of leading the state, and that is the strength of the party, unlike the ruling LDF, which has only one chief ministerial face — Vijayan, senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala has said.



While not ruling out himself as an aspirant for the top post, Chennithala said that the Congress's first priority is to win the crucial polls, and that the party leadership will decide who should be the next chief minister.

In Kottayam, senior Congress leader PJ Kurien claimed in the presence of Chennithala that the UDF would return to power in Kerala and former minister Ramesh Chennithala would become the CM. —*PTI*

UDF leader's 'beauty' remark sparks row

A Irshad, a UDF leader has commented against the sitting Kayamkulam MLA and LDF candidate of the constituency for Kerala Polls, U Prathibha, claiming that she was "selling" her eloquence and beauty for a third win from the seat. He also accused the MLA of not doing any work for the people. —*PTI*

Linking me to Pak is CM's wild theory: Gogoi

JORHAT, 25 MARCH

Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday dismissed Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's allegations linking him and his wife to Pakistan as a "wild theory existing in his head", and said such claims expose the CM's "weakness" and the extent he can go to over a matter as serious as national security.

The Jorhat MP said there is a difference between Sarma's attacks and the Congress charge against him.

"There is a difference between what Sarma is saying and what I am saying against him — his is a 'wild theory' which exists only in his head, and it relates to something very serious as national security," Gogoi said.

"What we are saying about his family, wealth, corruption, and benefit the government machinery is giving to his wife's company -- that is for everybody to see," he claimed.

In contrast, Sarma's allegations are "fiction", and he is "peddling national security as a wild theory to fulfil his larger scheme of things", Gogoi alleged. —*PTI*

PRAFUL TRIED TAKING OVER NCP AFTER AJIT'S DEATH: ROHIT

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

NCP (SP) MLA **Rohit Pawar** on Wednesday alleged a "premeditated" attempt by senior leaders Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare to seize control of the NCP following the sudden death of Ajit Pawar in January by giving sweeping powers to its working president.

Talking to reporters here, Rohit claimed that 18 days after the death of Ajit Pawar on 28 January, Patel, Tatkare and Brijmohan Srivastava had written to the Election Commission of India that the party constitution had been amended and sought that all powers be handed to the working president. Patel was the working president at that time.

However, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar subsequently wrote to the poll panel asking it to disregard any such correspondence, Rohit said at a press conference here.

Meanwhile, nearly two months after demanding an investigation into the Baramati plane crash, Rohit Pawar, registered the FIR at the High Grounds Police Station in Bengaluru on Wednesday. He said that the Karnataka Police have "handed over" the FIR to the Maharashtra Police, who, he added, had the onus to ensure the accused in the plane crash incident were punished. —*PTI*

IN AKBAR & RAISINA ROADS

Cong's 48-yr-old HQs get eviction notices

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Congress party has received notices from the Estate department to vacate its 24, Akbar Road office and 5, Raisina Road premises in Lutyens Delhi by 28 March, according to sources.

The Akbar Road bungalow served as the Congress party's headquarters for 48 years.

The party faces eviction of its old party office, which it has held since 1978, as this is the final notice sent by the estate department.

The party continues to have its headquarters at its Akbar Road office, while the Indian Youth Congress functions from the Raisina Road premises.

The sources said that the notice was delivered a few days ago and has not even given a week's time to the grand old party.

Congress faces eviction of its old party office, which it has held since 1978, as this is the final notice sent by the estate department —*ANI*

Sources in the party said the Congress is yet to formulate its strategy on the issue and may even approach court in view of the sudden notice.

The Congress has already constructed its new party office at Indira Bhawan.

- The party continues to have its headquarters at its Akbar Road office, while the Indian Youth Congress functions from Raisina Road premises.

While the party did not say anything officially, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said the government should apply its rule uniformly to all and not single it out.

Meanwhile, amid mounting chaos over a notice to vacate, Congress MP Imran Masood on Wednesday claimed that the BJP government was attempting to silence the party through pressure tactics. —*Agencies*

—INSTAGRAM

'Dhurandhar' 2 faces police case for 'hurting' Sikhs

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

A Mumbai-based Sikh organisation filed a police complaint against actor Ranveer Singh and the makers of 'Dhurandhar: The Revenge' on Wednesday for allegedly hurting religious sentiments, officials said on Wednesday. In a poster for the film, Singh is depicted wearing a turban, a long beard, and a kada (bracelet) — sacred Sikh symbols — while holding a cigarette. The Sikh community states that this depiction has deeply hurt their religious sentiments, according to a complaint submitted at the Mulund police station on 17 March. The organisation has demanded action against the film's director, producer and Singh. No FIR has been registered so far, and the investigation is underway, a police official said.—*PTI*

HC extends stay on FIR order against Sambhal cops

PRAYAGRAJ, 25 MARCH:

The Allahabad High Court has extended its interim stay on the Sambhal chief judicial magistrate's order directing registration of FIR against several policemen, including the then circle officer Anuj Kumar Chaudhary. Earlier, Justice Samit Gopal had, after hearing a petition filed by Chaudhary, stayed operation of then chief judicial magistrate's order directing registration of the FIR. The state government had also challenged the order. The complainant, Yameen, had moved a petition, alleging that his son Alam was selling pape (rusk) and biscuits in his cart near Jama Masjid at Sambhal's Mohalla Kot area on 24 November, 2024, when the named police officials suddenly opened fire at the crowd "with the intention to kill". —*PTI*

Pakistani intruder detained in Jammu & Kashmir

JAMMU, 25 MARCH

A Pakistani intruder was detained by Border Security Force (BSF) along the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district on Wednesday, officials said. Alert BSF troops picked up the movement of an elderly Pakistani opposite Border Out Post Bhaller in Ramgarh sector and challenged him when he intruded into this side, the officials said. They said he surrendered on being challenged and preliminary questioning revealed that he had inadvertently crossed the border. He is likely to be repatriated after completion of necessary formalities shortly, the officials said. —*PTI*

2 dead, 23 hurt after Jaipur bus overturns in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

A speeding sleeper bus from Jaipur overturned while taking a sharp turn near Hanuman Mandir in Karol Bagh's Jhandewalan area on early Wednesday morning, killing two passengers and injuring 23 others. The Delhi-bound bus from Jaipur had around 30 passengers on board, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Rohit Rajbir Singh. The deceased have been identified as Shehbaj Alam and Mahesh, he said. An FIR has been registered at Karol Bagh police station against the bus driver under BNS sections 281, 125 and 106 The bus driver, Pankaj Kumar, 26, a resident of Rajasthan's Alwar, has been detained and is undergoing treatment at RML Hospital. Around 10 injured passengers were rushed to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and later discharged. 12 others were taken to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. A probe is underway and action will be taken against the driver, the police said.—*PTI*

Shameful: SC raps cops in minor's rape probe

Says it was 'insensitive' for Haryana cops to summon 3-yr-old rape survivor, forms SIT

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday constituted a special investigation team of women IPS officers to conduct a fair investigation into the rape of a three-year-old girl in Haryana's Gurugram.

The apex court asked the Haryana government to immediately notify the SIT and directed the Gurugram Police to hand over the case records to the probe panel.

The bench rapped the Haryana Police for downgrading the offence from a harsher provision to a milder one in its FIR filed under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act.

It also pulled up a doctor at a private hospital for completely changing her version on the child's statement.

The top court issued show cause notices to officials of Gurugram Police and asked them why action should not be taken against them for shoddy investigation in the case.

- SC issued show cause notices to Gurugram Police, asking them why action should not be taken against them for shoddy probe. It also issued a show cause notice to the Child Welfare Committee.

The bench also issued a show cause notice to Gurugram Child Welfare Committee (CWC) as to why they should not be removed.

"The conduct of CWC members, as seen from the 5 February report, compounded the victimisation. The entire police force made all attempts to prove that the child had no proof and the parents did not make any case," it said.

The top court then directed the Gurugram district judge to entrust the case to a senior woman judicial officer presiding over a POCSO court in the city.

The three-year-old girl was allegedly sexually assaulted by two female domestic helps and their male accomplice for approximately two months at a society in Sector 54

An FIR was registered on 4 February under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the POCSO Act at the Sector 53 police station, they added.

Although the incident occurred between December 2025 and January 2026, the parents reported the matter to the police after the girl dislater closed her ordeal to her mother. —*PTI*

NHA FACES RS 29K CR HIT AS SC UPHOLDS PAYMENT FOR LANDOWNERS

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Underling the constitutional guarantee of just compensation, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said solatium and interest in a land acquisition matter cannot be contingent on the magnitude of the financial burden.

A bench of **Chief Justice Surya Kant** and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan made the observation while disposing of the National Highway Authority of India's (NHAI) plea seeking review of the apex court's February 4, 2025 verdict -- that the 2019 decision of the top court allowing grant of compensation and interest to farmers whose land was acquired under the NHAI Act would apply retrospectively.

The bench said interest payable to the landowners will be according to the land Acquisition Act. The court said NHAI sought a review of the decision on stating that financial liability from solatium and interest to land owners by NHAI was not Rs 100 crore but Rs 29,000 crore. —*PTI*

SC bins plea against Centre's circular on 'Vande Mataram'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a plea against a Home Ministry circular on singing of national song 'Vande Mataram' at official events, saying that a directive was not mandatory.

The court termed the plea filed by one Muhammed Sayeed Noori as "premature" and based on "vague apprehension of discrimination".

Senior advocate Sanjay Hegde, appearing for Noori, said they respect every religion in the country, but if people are compelled to sing the song irrespective of their religion and faith, some may find it a compulsion to participate in the "social demonstration of loyalty".

The court asked if the circular specified any penal consequences for not singing the national song or if any person had been removed from the congregation for not singing it.

"Penalty is there in case of disruption," Hegde said, "While there may be no legal sanction, there is always a huge burden for someone who refuses to sing or stand up. Can people be compelled to

- The court asked if the circular specified any penal consequences for not singing the national song or if any person had been removed from the congregation for not singing it.

sing the song in the garb of an advisory?"

The court asked Hegde whether any notice had been sent to the petitioner compelling anyone to sing the national song.

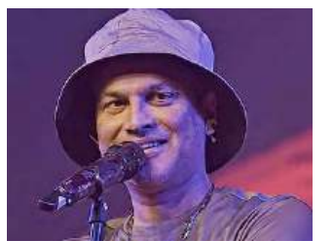
The court said the petitioner can approach the court in case of any penal action or notice to him, and observed that at present the petition is nothing but a "vague apprehension of discrimination". —*PTI*

'Zubeen died due to accidental drowning'

SINGAPORE, 25 MARCH

A state coroner on Wednesday upheld the Singapore Police Coast Guard's (PCG) finding that there was no foul play in the death of **Indian singer Zubeen Garg** and ruled the death an accidental drowining.

Directly addressing a concern raised by Garg's widow regarding the PCG's finding, State Coroner Adam Nakhoda stated that the PCG had conducted a comprehensive and thorough investigation in



this case.

Instead, Nakhoda found that no one had forced, coerced or pushed Garg into the water. There was also no evidence that the swimmers rescuing him had deliberately held his face underwater.

Garg, 52, had been intoxicated, and this likely impaired his judgment in his decisions, said Nakhoda.

Garg drowned in the waters off Lazarus Island on 19 September, 2025, a day before he was slated to perform at the North East India Festival.

A group of about 20 dropped anchor on a yacht they were on between Lazarus Island and St John's Island and took part in activities such as drinking alcohol, swimming and kayaking.

A toxicology analysis found that Garg had a blood alcohol concentration of 333 milligrams per 100 millilitres of blood, which suggests severe intoxication.

A high concentration of ethanol was also found in his urine samples.

Garg has a medical history of hypertension and epilepsy.

The coroner accepted that it was possible that Garg had suffered an epileptic fit prior to his drowning. —*PTI*

Centre asks states to reserve 20% jobs for Agniveers

HAMIRPUR, 25 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has written to all states to reserve 20 per cent jobs for Agniveers for their rehabilitation after they complete their four-year term in 2027, an official said on Wednesday.

The letter is addressed to the chief ministers, said Sainik Welfare Department director Brigadier Madan Sheel Sharma (Retd).

Following the receipt of the letter, the Himachal Pradesh Sainik Welfare Department sent a report to the state government to consider the proposal.

The ministry called for a 20

per cent reservation in positions such as forest guards, mining guards, police constables, firemen, mounted police, jail wardens, Special Police Officers and the state disaster response force.

Haryana has become the first state to implement reservations for Agniveers in uniformed services, such as police, mining guards, jail wardens, special police officers, and Group C positions.

The Uttarakhand Cabinet in August last year approved 10 per cent horizontal reservation for direct recruitment in government services to former Agniveers after their return from the army.

The reservation pertains to uniformed posts of Group 'C' in services under the state government.

Former Agniveers have been exempted from appearing in the physical efficiency test in the direct recruitment examination and are given relaxation in the maximum age limit. —*PTI/Agencies*

'Satellite glitch hampers India security, intel ops'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

With India's navigation satellite system — Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) — not fully functional, one of the biggest concerns is that the country will be unable to use it for security and strategic purposes, experts say.

The major setback occurred after the last atomic clock on board the Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System-1F (IRNSS-1F) stopped functioning on March 10, leaving only three satellites of the constellation capable of providing position, navigation, and timing (PNT) services.

At least four satellites with operational atomic clocks are required for the navigation satellite system to function properly.

Ananya Ray, a former scientist with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), said in an interview, "Systems like NavIC have two signals: an open signal for common people and a restricted military signal that increases accuracy roughly tenfold."

Armed forces of countries use the navigation satellite system for logistics, mapping and operational planning, and relying on a foreign navigation satellite system could pose security issues, especially during wars.

"If you are in a war and using someone else's system, they could add errors to the signals or spoof you," said Ray—*PTI*

India's 1st passive euthanasia patient cremated, eyes donated

GAZIABAD, 23 MARCH

The parents of **Harish Rana,** the first person in India permitted passive euthanasia, described him as a good son as they mourned during his last rites.

Harish's mother Nirmala Devi bid an emotional farewell to her son with folded hands and met those present, while his father Ashok Rana urged mourners not to cry, saying his son was in a "happy place now."

Harish's last rites were conducted at the Green Park cremation ground in South Delhi on Wednesday morning, marking a quiet end to his 13-year medical ordeal.

Family members, along with representatives of the Brahma Kumaris, a spiritual movement led by women, NGOs, AIIMS staff, relatives, and friends attended the cremation.

People attend the funeral of Harish Rana at the Green Park cremation ground in New Delhi on Wednesday—*ANI*

Ashish Rana, Harish's younger brother, lit the pyre, accompanied by his sister, Bhavna.

Sister Lovely of the Brahma Kumaris said, "The family decided to donate Harish's eyes."

It could not be confirmed whether any other organs were also donated, as family members were unavailable for further comments.

Harish slipped into a coma in 2013 after falling from a fourth-floor balcony at Panjab University. He passed away on Tuesday. —*PTI*

3 more held in Pak-linked espionage racket in UP

GAZIABAD/AMRAVATI, 25 MARCH

Police have arrested three more alleged members of a Pakistan-linked espionage racket that was sending sensitive information to the neighbouring country, taking the total number of arrests in the case to 21, an official said.

The accused includes Sameer alias Shooter, a native of Bihar's Bhagalpur and currently residing in Delhi, who is said to be a key member of the alleged network.

The other two arrested are Sameer of Shamli district and Shivraj from Shahjahanpur, currently residing in Ghaziabad, police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Trans Hindon) Dhawal Jasiwal said the National Investigation Agency has interrogated the accused.

"With these, 21 people have been arrested so far, including six minors. Ghaziabad police have filed a charge-sheet in

the district court," he said.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh police has arrested 12 people in Amravati with suspected terror links following a coordinated multi-state operation. The suspects were in contact with foreign handlers linked to Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and working towards anti-national objectives, intelligence official said.

Special teams were deployed in Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Telangana and Rajasthan to arrest the suspects, police said on Wednesday —*PTI*

CALLS ALLEGATIONS MISLEADING

Kochi Biennale head quits amid sexual harassment case

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which brings together artists from across the world to the Kerala coastal town, finds itself under a cloud again with allegations of sexual harassment against co-founder Bose Krishnamachari.

The sexual harassment complaint was "one of the reasons" for Krishnamachari's resignation from the post of president of the Biennale in January, Kochi Biennale Foundation chairperson Venu Vasudevan said. Krishnamachari termed the allegations "misleading, unverified, and taken out of context".

Krishnamachari, a well-known contemporary painter, had stepped down as Biennale president and as a member of the board of trustees of the

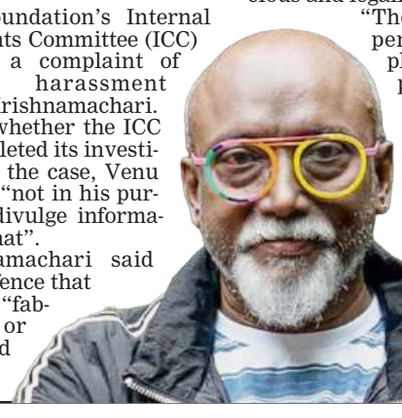
- Krishnamachari, a well-known contemporary painter, had stepped down as Biennale president and as a member of the board of trustees of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, citing "personal and family reasons".

Kochi Biennale Foundation, citing "personal and family reasons".

The Foundation's Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) received a complaint of sexual harassment against Krishnamachari.

Asked whether the ICC has completed its investigation in the case, Venu said it is "not in his purview to divulge information on that".

Krishnamachari said in his defence that there are "fabricated or altered emails and messages" being circulated online and these are "malicious and legally actionable".



"There are no pending complaints or legal proceedings against me before any competent authority in this regard," he said.

In January, Krishnamachari issued a statement announcing his resignation and said he will be returning to his own artistic practice.

Earlier this month, the Kochi Municipal Corporation appointed Krishna machari as the art, design and cultural curator of Kochi city.

In 2018, ahead of the fourth edition of the biennale, co-founder Riyas Komu stepped down from all management positions connected to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale after anonymous allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

Nearly two months after Krishnamachari quit from his position, the Kochi Biennale Foundation appointed artist Jitish Kallat as president.

He will chair the selection of the curator for the next edition. —*PTI*

'Antibiotic resistance fuels 87% of typhoid economic burden'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Antibiotic-resistant typhoid infections accounted for at least 87 per cent of India's disease-related economic burden in 2023, according to a study in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia.

The total economic burden due to typhoid fever was estimated at Rs 123 billion.

Children under the age of 10 incurred the highest economic burden, contributing to over half of the costs.

Households bore 91 per cent of expenses, and 70,000 families faced "catastrophic" health expenditure.

Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal were estimated to account for 51 per cent of the national costs.

Typhoid fever is an infectious disease commonly transmitted through contaminated food or water.

The authors said the findings provide key evidence to support the introduction of the typhoid conjugate vaccine in the national immunisation schedule, which is under consideration.

Evidence from the study also supports enhancing antibiotic resistance control and guiding national health financing policies.

The researchers analysed empirical data from India on typhoid epidemiology, care-seeking, clinical outcomes, and estimated direct and indirect treatment costs.

The antibiotic fluoroquinolone is highly effective in reducing fever in typhoid within four days. —*PTI*

FIVE GOALS, FUZZY ENDGAME: TRUMP'S IRAN STRATEGY IN QUESTION

President Donald Trump has listed five objectives that the US wants to achieve before ending its war with Iran.

Now, as he suggests the US may soon be "winding down" the operation after three and a half weeks, some of his key aims remain undefined or unfulfilled.

Trump most recently outlined five goals for the massive air campaign. That's up from four laid out by his staff and since the war's start 28 February (and up from the three generally enumerated by the Pentagon and Secretary of State Marco Rubio).

Though the Trump administration has said its objectives are clear and unchanging, the list of priorities has expanded and shifted as the war has taken a toll on the global economy, tested alliances and raised unanswered questions about the planning for the conflict, its justification and its aftermath.

By most accounts, the strikes by the US and Israel have significantly degraded Iran's military capabilities and killed scores of senior leaders. But those tactical successes don't necessarily translate to achieving all the president's strategic aims.

Some of his objectives are difficult to achieve and if the US walks away with unfinished aims and Iran's paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard in power, Trump could face political fallout at home and global repercussions about what was accomplished in his decision to launch a war of choice that upended the Middle East and roiled the global economy.

Anna Kelly, a White House spokesperson, said the operation "has been a resounding success — Iran's navy is destroyed, their defence industrial base is dismantled, and their dreams of possessing a nuclear weapon shatter more by the day."

Here's a look at the objectives as laid out in Trump's words Friday and where they stand:

1. 'COMPLETELY DEGRADING IRANIAN MISSILE CAPABILITY'

One of the prime objectives laid out by the president with Iran is to "destroy their missiles and raze their missile industry to the ground."

The administration says that ability has been significantly degraded.

But in the fourth week of the war, Iran is still launching missiles and drones, including a series of barrages at Israel early Tuesday after Trump claimed that negotiations with Iran were underway.

In an update last week, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said Iran's missile and drone programmes are being "overwhelmingly destroyed" and ballistic missile attacks against US forces are "down 90 per cent since the start of the conflict."

First responders inspect the remains of a residential building hit in a strike during the U.S.-Israeli military campaign in Iran —PTI

Trump on Monday repeated that 90 per cent statistic and said, "They can't launch them, and they don't have very many of them, as most of them have been annihilated." He added on Tuesday that 82 per cent of Iran's missile launchers were "killed."

2. 'DESTROYING IRAN'S DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL BASE'

Before Friday, the president and his administration sometimes listed this as a standalone objective, describing it as a goal to "raze their missile industry to the ground."

Other times, this has fallen off the list. The Pentagon has generally lumped it into the first objective of destroying Iran's missile capability.

US Central Command has said its targets for strikes in Iran have included weapons production and missile and drone manufacturing facilities. But Iranian attacks against its Gulf neighbours and Israel continue.

3. 'ELIMINATING THEIR NAVY AND AIR FORCE'

The US and Israel quickly established air superiority in the skies above Iran, where they have flown largely unchallenged. US Central Command said Monday the US has damaged or destroyed more than 140 Iranian vessels.

After a US submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian warship in early March, two other Iranian vessels — the IRIS Bushehr and IRIS Lavan — docked in Sri Lanka and India and sought assistance from the two countries. There has been no indication from the US that they have since been sunk or captured.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard has its own navy that also relies on smaller vessels to do swarm attacks and drop mines. It is unclear how much of that force remains or whether it has planted any mines. But Iranian missiles continue to disrupt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

4. 'NEVER ALLOWING IRAN TO GET EVEN CLOSE TO NUCLEAR CAPABILITY'

Trump made a marked shift over the last year after declaring that the US has "obliterated" Iran's nuclear programme in June, only for his aides to warn that Iran was just weeks away from a bomb to justify the current operations.

The US has not announced new strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, but Israel has announced a series of strikes on nuclear-related targets, including the killing of a top Iranian nuclear scientist.

One of the most pressing questions in the war is whether Trump will seek to seize or destroy about 970 pounds of enriched uranium Tehran has that could potentially be used for a weapon.

Trump for the first time on Monday said the US would retrieve the uranium, which is believed to be buried deep under a mountain facility.

But he indicated that would occur if the US struck some kind of deal with Iran to the US to retrieve it. Without permission from Iran, experts say, seizing it would be a dangerous mission involving a sizable deployment of US troops into the country.

5. 'PROTECTING, AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, OUR MIDDLE EASTERN ALLIES'

Trump in a social media post Friday added a fifth objective for the U.S: "Protecting, at the highest level, our Middle Eastern Allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and others. The Hormuz Strait will have to be guarded and policed, as necessary, by other Nations who use it — The United States does not!"

The US already maintains thousands of troops on bases and other installations in the region, and it's not clear how much further Trump is willing to go to protect Middle East allies from threats, and Iran is still able to attack those countries.

It's also not clear how far the US is willing to go to keep open the Strait of Hormuz. Trump has vacillated on whether the US needs to take a role in policing it. On Monday, he extended a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on its power plants.

REGIME CHANGE IS NOT OFFICIALLY ON THE LIST

Trump has spoken about regime change since the start of the war, encouraging the Iranian people to "take over your government" after Israel, assisted by the US, launched strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader and much of its upper leadership echelon.

Trump and his administration, however, have never explicitly stated regime change as an objective in Iran, despite making it clear they want to end the repressive theocracy's 47-year reign.

"The leaders are all very different than the ones that we started off with that created all those problems," Trump said Tuesday.

He added a moment later, "This is regime change, right?"

Now the US is claiming to be holding talks with elements of the same Iranian government as it looks to bring a swift end to the conflict and reopen the Strait of Hormuz to maritime traffic. And those hopes for the Iranian people appear set to continue unfulfilled.

ALSO FALLING OFF THE LIST: CUTTING OFF SUPPORT FOR IRANIAN PROXY GROUPS

Trump administration officials have offered few updates about this objective, which the president has described as ensuring that "the region's terrorist proxies can no longer destabilise the region or the world and attack our forces" and "ensuring that the Iranian regime cannot continue to arm, fund, and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders."

While the US has struck Iranian-aligned militia groups in Iraq, and Israel appears to be expanding its operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, the administration has not offered details about how it's going to permanently halt Tehran's support for the militant groups.

The White House said in a statement that ensuring that Iranian proxy groups cannot further destabilise the region remains a key goal and that "proxies are hardly putting up a fight because our United States Military is so strong and lethal." —PTI

SALAR سالار

New FCRA bill creates new body to manage NGOs' assets

A legislation brought by the government to amend the FCRA will significantly tighten its oversight of foreign-funded organisations, proposing the creation of a powerful new authority to seize and manage the assets of non-profits that lose their licence.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai on Wednesday, entails a comprehensive statutory framework for vesting, supervision, management and disposal of foreign contributions and assets through a 'designated authority', including provisional and permanent vesting.

At present, approximately 16,000 associations are registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and receive around Rs 22,000 crore annually, according to the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill.

"Over the period, certain operational and legal gaps have been identified, particularly in relation to the management of foreign contributions and assets created therefrom in cases where registration is cancelled, surrendered or otherwise ceases," it said.

The Bill provides for timelines for receipt and utilisation under prior permission; regulates dealing with assets during suspension of registration; provides for cessation of certificate upon expiry, non-renewal or refusal of renewal; rationalises penalties and introduces prior approval of the central government for initiation of investigation.

Countering the opposition's charges that the Bill is "dangerous", Rai asserted that it is "indeed dangerous" for those who engage in forced religious conversion using foreign contributions, as well as for individuals who abuse foreign funding for personal gain.

"The Modi government will not tolerate any misutilisation of foreign funding and will take strong action against such elements," he said.

The Bill also seeks to reduce punishment from five years imprisonment to one year for whoever accepts, or assists any person, political party or organisation in accepting any foreign contribution or any currency or security from a foreign source in contravention of any provision of FCRA.

It aims to tackle the multiplicity of investigations, inconsistency in penalties, absence of timelines for utilisation, lack of express provision for cessation of registration, and ambiguity regarding the treatment of assets during suspension, which have resulted in implementation challenges.

Union MoS Nityanand Rai speaks in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi —ANI

- At present, approximately 16,000 associations are registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and receive around Rs 22,000 crore annually, according to the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill.

The proposed law also introduces a provision which will allow the certificate, granted under the FCRA to receive foreign funds, to be automatically treated as expired once its validity period ends if the holder fails to apply for renewal on time, submits a renewal application that is later rejected by the government, or does not get the certificate renewed before its expiry date.

"No person whose certificate has ceased to exist shall either receive or utilise the foreign contribution unless the certificate is renewed," the bill states.

In the FCRA, Section 15 provides for vesting of assets, but the absence of a comprehensive framework for supervision, management and disposal of such assets has led to administrative uncertainty and scope for misuse.

Under the proposed law, the government has introduced a new Chapter IIIA to establish a "designated authority" to take provisional or permanent control of assets created from foreign contributions in cases where foreign contribution certificates have been cancelled, surrendered or ceased.

It provides for a comprehensive framework for vesting, supervision, management and disposal of foreign contributions and assets in a 'designated authority', including provisional and permanent vesting.

The foreign contribution and the assets created out of foreign contribution of any person--whose certificate has been cancelled under Section 14; or who has surrendered the certificate under section 14A; or whose certificate has ceased under section 14B or any rules made under this Act -- shall, from the date of such cancellation, surrender or cessation, vest provisionally in the Designated authority in such manner as may be prescribed, the proposed law said.

If an individual fails to obtain a fresh certificate or gets their certificate renewed or restored within the period referred in the law, the foreign contribution and the assets created out of foreign contributions shall thereupon stand permanently vested in the Designated authority, the Bill proposes.

The 'designated authority' shall apply the foreign contribution and the assets "permanently vested" in it for public purposes and may by an order transfer them to any Ministry, Department, authority or agency of the Central Government or of a State Government or any local authority, or dispose of through sale or any other appropriate process, and credit the sale proceeds together with any unutilised foreign contribution to the Consolidated Fund of India, it said.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, enacted on 1 May, 2011, regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions and foreign hospitality to ensure that such inflows do not adversely affect national interest, public order or national security. The Act has been amended in 2016, 2018 and 2020. —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Activists call passage of Transgender Amendment Bill a 'Black Day'

Activists on Wednesday termed the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, in the Lok Sabha a "black day" for the community, saying that the government is in a hurry to pass it in the Rajya Sabha as well.

Speaking to PTI, NCP-SP leader Anish Gawande, the country's first openly gay national spokesperson of a political party, said, "This is a black day for human rights in India.

The bill was passed without any concrete response to several valid concerns raised by the opposition, which shows the government's unwillingness to listen to constructive criticism."

He said there has been no meaningful engagement with the transgender community while drafting the legislation.

"How can you have a situation where Parliament discusses and passes a law meant for a community, which is protesting right outside Parliament against the same law?" he asked.

Questioning the government's claims, he said, "If it is protecting the transgender community from exploitation, then why are members of the transgender community opposing this bill?"

Calling it a "hurried, short-sighted decision", Gawande said it could "criminalise thousands of the most vulnerable members of the population in the days and months to come."

A member of the LGBTQIA+ community holds a placard during a protest against the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, in the Lok Sabha, at Azad Maidan, in Mumbai, on Wednesday —PTI

He added that the opposition would push for the bill to be sent to a standing committee and may explore legal options if it is passed.

"It is unprecedented in the history of parliamentary procedure in this country that after nearly every single opposition party has opposed this bill and said that it should be sent to a standing committee, the government has still refused to listen to these concerns," he told PTI.

Speaking about the next course of action, Gawande said, "The next step is to oppose the bill vociferously in the Rajya Sabha. We hope that better sense will prevail and that the government will recognise that this bill deserves to be sent to a standing committee."

"It seems likely that the government is in a hurry and will pass it in the Rajya Sabha as well. In that case, we will write to the President to send the bill back to Parliament," he said.

Gawande added that if the bill becomes law, members of the transgender community may move the Supreme Court, saying it is "violative of the NALSA verdict", and seek to have it struck down as unconstitutional.

Grace Banu, a Dalit transgender activist, strongly opposed the bill.

"I do not accept this. I will fight against this. This bill is highly unacceptable. This is against my people, my community. This is against our legal rights and identity," Banu said.

"This is a black day for my community. They are forcefully imposing Hindutva ideology on us because of our identity. Today, it will go to the Rajya Sabha, so we have begun our advocacy with MPs in the Upper House. Let's see. We have hope, our fight will continue," Banu told PTI.

On meeting opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, Banu said, "They strongly oppose this human rights violation. They shared solidarity with us."

On the agenda if the bill is passed in the Rajya Sabha, Banu said, "We are going to fight it till our last breath because we have the responsibility to create a safe and secure environment for the future generation."

Activist Akkai Padmashali expressed deep concern, saying, "I resist, I fight against, I do not accept this. This bill is highly unacceptable."

Kabir Maan, a Delhi-based Dalit Transman, described the passage of the bill in the Lok Sabha as the "scariest thing" for the community.

"It feels like nobody is thinking while the government is just passing the bill anyhow. It's very heartbreaking," Maan told PTI.

He said the government is pushing the bill in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday without considering the concerns of the community even once.

"We all watched the entire parliamentary proceedings live. They hardly spoke about the transgender bill. It's clearly visible that this government doesn't want us," he alleged. —PTI

IRAN READY FOR DEAL, SAYS DON; TEHRAN DENIES

Pakistan emerges as key interlocutor as Trump says everything in Iran is destroyed

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

President Donald Trump claimed that Iran was ready to strike a deal because "pretty much everything they have" was obliterated by US-Israeli strikes as Washington floated a 15-point peace deal. However, Tehran rejected Trump's assertions, saying that peace will only occur on Iran's "own terms," officials told Press TV, as the Iran sent back a five-point counter proposal.

Two officials from Pakistan, which delivered the US plan to Iran, said the 15-point addressed sanctions relief, a rollback of Iran's nuclear programme, limits on missiles and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

"We have people" negotiating, Trump said at the White House on Tuesday. "And the other side, I can tell you, they'd like to make a deal."

Trump said the participants included special envoy Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance. He has not said who from Iran they are in contact with. Iran has said it would like to negotiate with Vance. US is eyeing Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and is reportedly trying to strike a deal with the latter.

Notably, Pakistan has become the key mediator between Iran and the US, with Islamabad's officials confirming that they handed over both US' proposal and Tehran's response to the respective parties. Reports suggested that a meeting may take place in Islamabad.

Iran's Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which commands both the regular military and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, dismissed the idea of talks. "Our first and last word has been the same from day one: Someone like us will never come to terms with someone like you," spokesman Lt Col Ebrahim Zolfaghari said.

Notably, Iran has repeatedly said that it was bombed by the US and Israel during the previous two negotiations. "We have a very catastrophic experience with US diplomacy," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei noted. —*Agencies*

> **They (Iran) have agreed they will never have a nuclear weapon... They are going to make a deal. They did something yesterday that was amazing, actually. They gave us a present. And the present arrived today. It was a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

Smoke rises from Kuwait airport after a drone strike on fuel storage in Kuwait City on Friday —*PTI*

WHAT'S THE 15-POINT PLAN?

The US has reportedly sent a 15-point ceasefire plan to Iran. While the exact points have not yet been disclosed, sources have indicated what the contents could be. Diplomats suggest that many of the proposals aren't even new, with several clauses likely being non-starters for Iran. Here's a breakdown:

NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

Iran must dismantle its nuclear capabilities, vow to never pursue nuclear weapons, halt enrichment, hand over uranium stockpile and allow the UN nuclear watchdog full access inside Iran. The US will help Iran establish a civilian nuclear programme.

PROXIES AND MISSILES

Iran must abandon funding regional proxies, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. There are also likely curbs on what the range and quantity of Iran's missiles.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

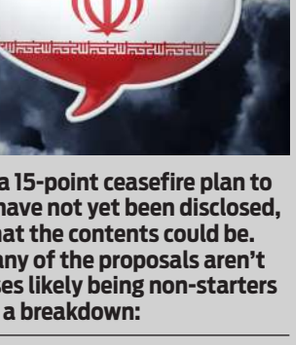
The Strait of Hormuz must remain open and function as a free maritime corridor.

WHAT DOES IRAN GET?

In return, the snapback mechanisms and sanctions on Iran are likely to be lifted.

IRAN'S COUNTER

- Halt killing of officials.
- Concrete guarantees that the war isn't reimposed.
- Reparation for damages.
- Ending the war on 'all fronts', including for regional groups.
- Iran's wants to 'exercise sovereignty over Hormuz', likely leading to taxation system similar to Egypt's Suez Canal toll



> **Have your internal conflicts reached to a point where you are negotiating with yourselves?... The strategic power you used to talk about has turned into a strategic failure. The one claiming to be a global superpower would have already gotten out of this mess if it could. Don't dress up your defeat as an agreement**
>
> Lt Col Ebrahim Zolfaghari, Iran military spokesperson

WHO IS NEGOTIATING?

Iran is looking to negotiate with US Vice President JD Vance, while Washington and Israel have granted temporary immunity to Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf. Previous negotiations included Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jarred Kushner. Pakistan appears to be mediating the talks.

Sharif briefs MBS on mediating US-Iran talks

ISLAMABAD, 25 MARCH

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday briefed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman about Islamabad's diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the tenuous West Asia situation.

Sharif, in a statement on X, reiterated Pakistan's strong condemnation of the recent attacks on the Kingdom and reaffirmed Islamabad's unwavering solidarity and unequivocal support for Saudi Arabia.

"I also briefed His Royal Highness on Pakistan's diplomatic outreach efforts for regional peace and stability. We agreed to remain in close coordination," he said.

Sharif said that he appreciated the Kingdom's restraint during the call.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar spoke with his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, regarding the evolving regional situation, according to the Foreign Office.

Dar also spoke to the British High Commissioner Jane Marriott and also met with Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong. —*PTI*

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman —*SAUDI PRESS AGENCY*

Hegseth didn't want to settle war: Trump

WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

Defence Secretary **Pete Hegseth** and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine didn't want to settle the Iran war, US President Donald Trump said at Swearing-In Ceremony for the Secretary of Homeland Security on Tuesday.

"I think this thing's going to be settled very soon and they go, 'Oh, that's too bad.' Pete didn't want it to be settled," Trump said. "They were not interested in settlement. They were interested in just winning this thing."

Trump had earlier suggested that it was Hegseth's idea to strike Iran.

Hegseth added that the United States "negotiates with bombs". —*Agencies*

Dozens killed as strikes continue

DUBAI, 25 MARCH

Dozens more people were killed as strikes continued across West Asia.

Iraq's Ministry of Defence said an airstrike on a military clinic in the Habbaniyeh area of Anbar province killed seven troops and wounded 13, as the government reportedly allowed militants to respond to attacks. Earlier strikes had killed at least 30 people.

Israel, meanwhile, said it carried out an extensive series of strikes on Iranian "production sites," without providing more information. Dozens of people were killed in Iran, including in the West and East Azerbaijan provinces. Blast echoed across Tehran.

Iran also fired at least a dozen missiles at Israel. First responders said three were wounded in southern Israel.

People take cover with their pets in a bomb shelter as air raid sirens warn of incoming Iranian missile strikes in Ramat Gan, Israel on Wednesday —*PTI*

Iran also kept up the pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbours. Kuwait said it shot down multiple drones but the General Civil Aviation Authority said one hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, sparking a fire.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry saying it had destroyed at least eight drones in the kingdom's oil-rich Eastern Province, drones flew over the UAE and missile alert sirens sounding in Bahrain.

Israel continued to pound Lebanon as Hezbollah launched missiles at them, saying negotiating would like surrendering. —*Agencies*

Non-hostile vessels can pass through Hormuz: Iran

NEW YORK, 25 MARCH

The Iranian Defence Council has announced that the transit of "non-hostile vessels" through the strategic Strait of Hormuz is now strictly dependent on prior "coordination with Iranian officials".

The Iranian mission in New York added in an X post on Wednesday that the condition include that the countries neither participate in nor support acts of aggression against Iran and fully comply with the declared safety and security regulations.

Iran made similar claims recently, and has allowed tankers to India, Pakistan and China. However, the IRGC Navy turned back a ship, SELEN, carrying food to Pakistan for allegedly failing to comply with protocols.

IRAN TO TAX SHIPS PASSING VIA HORMUZ

Shipping journal Lloyd's List said that at least one of nine ships that passed through the Strait has been taxed by Iran.

The ship reportedly paid $2 million for safe passage through Iran's Larak Island. It is unclear if the other ships also paid the fee, it said.

One of the ships that came to India reportedly went to the Iranian Island.

"A formalised approval process is expected soon, requiring extensive disclosure of the ships' ownership and destination, often via Iran-linked intermediaries," Lloyd's List stated. —*Agencies*

Trump's ratings at an all time low

Trump's approval rating fell to the lowest point in his second term, with only 36 per cent of American citizens approving of his job performance, while 62 per cent disapproved, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll. Only 25 per cent of those polled approved of his methods for tackling cost of living. Last week, 40 per cent approved of his overall performance while 58 per cent disapproved.

US to deploy 1,000 more troops

The American military is preparing to deploy around 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to West Asia in the coming days, sources said. The unit is considered the Army's emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice. It's the latest addition of American troops after US officials last week said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships will be heading to the region.

France probes Epstein link to Rothschild bank

PARIS, 25 MARCH

French financial prosecutors are investigating several locations tied to revelations in files on convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, including the Paris arm of Swiss private bank Edmond de Rothschild. . The case is being handled by France's central office for combating corruption, tax and financial offences. Investigators said on Tuesday that they are examining suspicions of bribery involving former French diplomat Fabrice Aidan. Whose name reportedly appeared in over 200 documents, including emails sent to Epstein between 2010 and 2016 from personal and UN accounts, creating suspicions he shared diplomatic documents with Epstein. Aidan's lawyer, however,has denied wrongdoing and called for respect for the presumption of innocence.—*PTI*

Minnesota sues Trump admin over ICE killings

WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

Minnesota officials have sued the Trump administration on Tuesday for access to evidence needed to independently investigate three shootings by ICE officers, including the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti. In addition to Pretti and Good, the lawsuit seeks evidence for Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis, who was injured by ICE agents in January. The lawsuit alleges the federal government broke its promise to cooperate with state investigations, shielding agents from scrutiny regarding potential criminal violations against residents. The Trump administration had deployed thousands of officers to the Minneapolis and St Paul area as part of its deportation campaign. Calling it its largest-ever successful operation, but Minnesota leaders strongly criticised it. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

Brazil SC lets Bolsonaro serve jail time at home

SAO PAULO, 24 MARCH

Brazil's Supreme Court on Tuesday gave permission to former president Jair Bolsonaro to serve his 27-year sentence for an attempted coup from his home instead of prison in view of his falling health. Bolsonaro family of the right-wing leader had requested the court send him home since he was convicted in November. The decision followed Bolsonaro's hospitalisation since 13 March for pneumonia. Bolsonaro, who governed from 2019 to 2022, was recently in intensive care for of kidney problems and other issues. In the past, Brazil's Supreme Court has only reversed house arrest if the detainee's health were to dramatically improve. —*PTI*

BBC names ex-Google exec as Director-General

LONDON, 25 MARCH

Former Google executive Matt Brittin will be the new Director-General of the BBC, the broadcaster announced on Wednesday. The UK's national broadcaster faces an uncertain future and a USD 10 billion lawsuit from US President Donald Trump. Brittin, 57, spent almost two decades working at Google, becoming the company's president in Europe, West Asia, and in Africa. However, he does not have a background in broadcasting. Brittin will start the job on 18 May. He replaces Tim Davie, who resigned in November over criticism of how the BCC edited a speech Trump made on 6 January, 2021, before the Capitol Hill riots. The British broadcasting network is also facing a once-a-decade process of renewing its governing charter, which sets out how much public money it will receive. —*PTI*

AMID US-GREENLAND TENSIONS

Denmark PM's fate unclear as poll results inconclusive

COPENHAGEN, 25 MARCH

Denmark's election Tuesday ended in an inconclusive result that left the Prime Minister's future unclear, after a campaign that focused on bread-and-butter issues rather than her handling of the crisis over US President Donald Trump's ambitions toward Greenland.

Official results showed that Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's centre-left Social Democrats and two partners in the government lost ground compared with the last election in 2022.

Neither left-leaning nor right-leaning blocs won a majority in parliament, leaving Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, a former prime minister, in the role of kingmaker.

His centrist Moderate party, with 14 lawmakers in the 179-seat parliament, is in a position to determine whether Frederiksen can serve a third term at the helm of the European Union and NATO country.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at Parliament in Denmark, after General Polls —*PTI*

Frederiksen said that she is ready to stay on as prime minister. "The world is unsettled. There are strong winds around us," she said.

"Denmark needs a stable government, a competent government. We are ready to take the lead."

Lokke Rasmussen called on rivals on the left and right to climb down from some of the positions they staked out in the campaign, and "come and play with us."

- Following the general elections, Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said, "Denmark needs a stable government, a competent government. We are ready to take the lead."

But Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen made clear that he and his Liberal party don't intend to go into government with her Social Democrats again.

Frederiksen had hoped for a better result, but it was normal for a party seeking a third term to lose ground.

Notably, voters said that the US-Greenland tensions did not factor into the polls, as all parties agreed it should remain in the Kingdom. —*PTI*

'Pak's 1971 killings a preplanned massacre'

DHAKA, 25 MARCH

Bangladesh Prime Minister **Tarique Rahman** described the 1971 killings as a "preplanned massacre," urging citizens to uphold equality, dignity and social justice rooted in the Liberation War.

In a message ahead of Genocide Remembrance Day, he called the crackdown one of the darkest chapters in the nation's history and stressed the importance of educating future generations about its significance.

The Pakistani army reportedly killed over 20,000 people in a one night, while near three million died during the nine-month war. Rahman noted that resistance began the same night.

The country observes 25 March as Genocide Day and celebrates Independence Day on 26 March, for the sacrifices that led to freedom. —*PTI*

Russia, Ukraine trade largest aerial assaults

MOSCOW, 25 MARCH

Russian air defences downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defence Ministry said Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since its invasion of Ukraine more than four years ago.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine in the space of 24 hours, extending its usual nighttime barrage into daylight hours in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war. At least 6 people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities reported.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Bernardine Church in Lyiv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was damaged in the attack.

Russia stopped drones were over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Alexander Drozdenko, Governor of the Leningrad region, said a fire broke out in the Baltic Sea port of Ust-Luga as the result of Ukraine's attack.

Bernardine Church, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Ukraine hit in Russian strike —*X @ANDRII_SYBIHA*

Ukrainian forces also carried out a missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure.

Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov stated. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Silver surges ₹11,250/kg, gold jumps ₹4,900

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Precious metals rallied by up to 5 per cent, with silver soaring by Rs 11,250 to Rs 2.41 lakh per kilogram, while gold climbed to Rs 1.49 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid strong global trends. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal surged by Rs 11,250, or 4.89 per cent, to Rs 2,41,250 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Tuesday's closing level of Rs 2,30,000 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also increased by Rs 4,900, or 3.38 per cent, to Rs 1,49,700 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal had settled at Rs 1,44,800 per 10 grams in the bullion market. In the international market, spot gold gained USD 82.17, or nearly 2 per cent, to USD 4,556.55 per ounce, while silver was trading 2 per cent higher at USD 72.67 per ounce. *—PTI*

CRED unveils UPI biometrics for up to ₹5,000

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Fintech platform CRED on Wednesday said its users can now authorise UPI payments using their face or fingerprint for transactions up to Rs 5,000. The feature, developed in collaboration with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is available on both iOS and Android devices, the company said in a statement. The authentication method applies to all UPI-based transactions on the platform, including credit card bills, utility payments, merchant transactions, and peer-to-peer transfers. "Biometric authentication is available for transactions up to Rs 5,000 on both iOS and Android... This feature enables members to securely use the authentication method enabled on their own devices (iOS and Android), in line with regulatory guidelines. *—PTI*

S&P ups India's FY27 growth forecast to 7.1%

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday raised India's GDP growth forecast for the next fiscal to 7.1 per cent, with private consumption, investment and exports being key drivers, but said that the conflict in the Middle East could strain the fiscal position due to higher energy prices arising from the conflict. In its latest quarterly Asia-Pacific economic commentary, it said risks from renewed geopolitical tensions and persistent trade-related uncertainties could affect India through fluctuations in commodity prices, trade volumes, and capital flows. It expects fuel prices in India to rise if oil prices remain elevated, to contain subsidy costs, but does not foresee a full pass. *—PTI*

KV Ramana Murty appointed as Sebi member

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The government has appointed Kompella Venkata Ramana Murty as a whole-time member of Sebi for a period of three years. With this addition, the regulatory board now has its full team of four full-time members. The other three whole-time members are Amarjeet Singh, Kamlesh Chandra Varshney, and Sandip Pradhan. Murty, a retired 1991 batch Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS) officer, previously served as Additional Controller General of Defence Accounts at Ministry of Defence. According to a government notification late on Tuesday, Murty has been appointed "for a period of three years from the date of assumption of charge of the post, or until further orders, whichever is earlier". *—PTI*

Investors get richer by ₹15.80L cr as mkts surge

Sensex climbs by 2,577.06 pts, while Nifty up by 392.05 pts

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

With a rebound in the stock market, investors' wealth has surged by Rs 15.80 lakh crore in two days following a sharp decline in crude oil prices and hopes of de-escalation in the West Asia war.

Stock markets have been rallying for the past two trading days, with the BSE Sensex climbing 2,577.06 points or 3.54 per cent. On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE benchmark jumped 1,205 points or 1.63 per cent to settle at 75,273.45.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 394.05 points or 1.72 per cent to end at 23,306.45.

Thanks to optimism in investors' sentiment, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies climbed Rs 15,80,204.92 crore to Rs 4,31,01,834.74 crore (USD 4.59 trillion) in two days.

From the 30-Sensex firms, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, Titan, InterGlobe Aviation and Trent were the biggest gainers on Wednesday.

Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Tata Consultancy Services and Bharat Electronics were the laggards.

The BSE SmallCap Select index jumped 3.05 per cent and MidCap Select index climbed 2.50 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended higher. BSE MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt surged 3.70 per cent, followed by commodities (2.75 per cent), PSU Bank (2.61 per cent), realty (2.53 per cent), metal (2.51 per cent), industrials (2.49 per cent) and services (2.42 per cent).

- A total of 2,959 stocks advanced, while 1,357 declined and 156 remained unchanged on the BSE.

A total of 2,959 stocks advanced, while 1,357 declined and 156 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 8,009.56 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 5,867.15 crore.

On Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 1,372.06 points or 1.89 per cent to settle at 74,068.45. The Nifty surged 399.75 points or 1.78 per cent to end at 22,912.40. *—PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US)	46,511.05	(0.79%)
S&P 500 (US)	6,627.91	(0.77%)
Nasdaq (US)	21,979.76	(0.99%)
Nikkei (Japan)	53,749.62	(2.87%)
Hang Seng (China)	25,335.96	(1.09%)
DAX (Germany)	22,824.28	(0.83%)
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,047.29	(0.82%)
CAC 40 (Paris)	7,834.36	(1.17%)
KOSPI (South Korea)	5,642.21	(1.59%)

Oil falls more than 5% over possible US-Iran talks

HONG KONG/ NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Oil prices fell more than 5 per cent on Wednesday over the possibility of a de-escalation of the Iran war and negotiations between the US and Iran.

US President Donald Trump's claims of progress being made from talks with Iran this week and his postponement on Monday of a deadline to "obliterate" Iran's power plants over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz have also fuelled optimism that an end to the Iran war could come soon.

With the Strait of Hormuz being a key waterway for crude oil and liquefied natural gas transport, oil and gas prices have spiked and fluctuated in recent days.

Oil prices fell again on growing hopes for a de-escalation. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 5.2 per cent to USD 94.97 per barrel. It was around USD 104 on Tuesday.

Benchmark US crude was down 5.3 per cent early Wednesday to USD 87.44 a barrel.

Meanwhile, crude oil prices declined more than 4 per cent to Rs 8,340 per barrel in futures trade on Wednesday tracking weak global trends amid reports of possible negotiations between the US and Iran to end the war.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for April delivery depreciated by Rs 396, or 4.5 per cent, to Rs 8,340 per barrel. The May contract also fell by Rs 305, or 3.58 per cent, to Rs 8,209 per barrel.

Globally, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures for the May contract slipped USD 3.21, or 3.48 per cent, to USD 89.14 per barrel on the NYMEX. *—PTI*

After IDFC, ₹150 cr FD fraud hits Kotak Bank in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 25 MARCH

An FIR has been filed in connection with alleged discrepancies related to Fixed Deposit Receipts (FDRs) involving nearly Rs 150 crore of Panchkula Municipal Corporation with a Kotak Mahindra Bank branch.

Haryana's State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (SVACB) filed the FIR on Tuesday night on cheating, conspiracy and other charges against unnamed bank officials and others, after the Haryana government decided to refer the case to the SVACB.

The Commissioner of PMC has been maintaining 16 FDs amounting to Rs 145,03,41,704 (over Rs 145 crore) with a maturity value of Rs 158,02,36,420 (over Rs 158 crore) in Kotak Mahindra Bank, Sector-11, Panchkula, according to the FIR.

Out of these, 11 FDs amounting to Rs 59,57,67,709 (over Rs 59 crore) have matured on 16 February, 2026.

"Further, as per the bank statement of account No.... received on March 16, the balance as on March 13 is reflected as Rs 2,17,74,394 (over Rs 2.17 crore) only as against the expected balance of Rs 50,0,24,463 (over Rs 50 crore)," the FIR said. *—PTI*

'India has upped rare mineral production to cut imports'

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India is ramping up domestic production of rare earth permanent magnets, crucial for electronics, space, aerospace, defence and electric vehicles, with the first-ever Samarium Cobalt plant becoming operational in 2023, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday.

While admitting that over 80 per cent of these magnets are still imported due to limited domestic capacity, Singh, who is MoS Prime Minister's Office, highlighted significant strides made in the last 10-11 years through high prioritisation by the government.

"Our present requirement of rare earth permanent magnet is 4,000 tonnes, but by the time we reach 2030 and are able to produce 5,000 tonnes indigenously, our requirement would have gone up to 8,000 tonnes," Singh said.

He outlined ambitious targets — 500 tonnes per annum in the first phase, scaling to 2,000 tonnes by 2028 and 5,000 tonnes by 2030.

Efforts are underway to scale up production, and the process is expected to accelerate once the SHANTI Act comes into force. *—PTI*

Sunil Mittal to retire as Airtel Africa Chairman

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Airtel Africa on Wednesday said **Sunil Bharti Mittal** will retire as Chairman of the board at the conclusion of the company's AGM in July 2026.

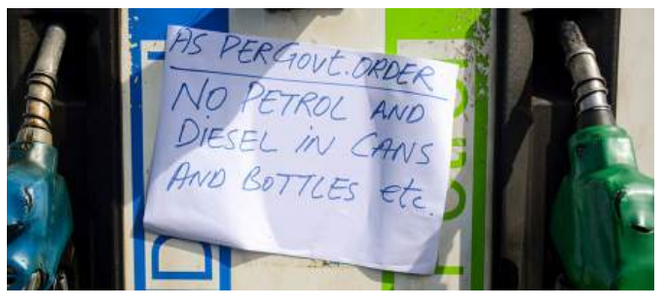
Gopal Vittal has been appointed as the Non-Executive Chairman with effect from same date while Shravin Bharti Mittal will assume the role of Deputy Chair.

Shravin's taking charge as Deputy Chair will ensure continuity with the founding family and significant shareholder in Airtel Africa, which provides telecommunications and mobile money services in 14 countries across Africa.

Mittal has served as Chair since listing in 2019, Airtel Africa said. *—PTI*

AMID WEST ASIA WAR

No fuel shortage, says oil cos; Urge to avoid panic buying



NEW DELHI/ HYDERABAD/ GANDHINAGAR, 25 MARCH

State-owned oil companies on Wednesday said there is no shortage of petrol, diesel or LPG in the country, urging citizens not to believe rumours circulating on social media or resort to panic buying.

Indian Oil Corporation, the nation's largest oil firm, said "there is no shortage of petrol or diesel", adding that its outlets are "well-stocked and fully operational". Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd termed reports of fuel shortages in certain areas "completely unfounded", asserting that "there is no shortage of fuel across the nation". Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd also said there is "no shortage of petrol, diesel or LPG across the country", with supplies remaining stable and stocks adequate.

While the war in West Asia has disrupted crude oil, LNG and LPG supply, India with its diversified sourcing has been able to secure enough supplies of crude oil from West Africa, Latin America and the US.

Meanwhile, the Telangana government on Wednesday debunked claims of a fuel shortage and advised the public to ignore the rumours that have triggered panic buying across the state.

Additionally, Gujarat government said there is no shortage of fuel in the state, and warned of strict action against hoarding and attempts to create artificial scarcity. *—PTI*

CCPA warns restaurants against levying gas charges

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on Wednesday warned hotels and restaurants not to levy additional charges, such as 'LPG charges' and 'fuel cost recovery', and said these are unfair trade practices, and strict action will be taken against them. The authority has termed it an unfair trade practice under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, pointing out that only applicable taxes can be added to the price mentioned in the menu. The CCPA clarified that input costs, such as fuel, LPG, electricity, and other operational expenses, are part of the cost of running a business and must be factored into the pricing of menu item. *—PTI*

RUPEE SLUMPS TO RECORD LOW OF 94.05 AGAINST USD

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

The rupee slumped 29 paise to close at record low of 94.05 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday as heavy FII outflows and simmering tensions in West Asia kept investors on the edge.

Even a drop in global crude oil prices, weaker greenback, and positive sentiments in the domestic equity markets could not provide any respite to the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 93.94 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 93.86-94.08, before settling at an all-time low of 94.05 (provisional), down 29 paise from its previous close.

The rupee dropped 23 paise to close at 93.76 against the US dollar on Tuesday.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.17 per cent lower at 99.26. *—PTI*

$375M PENALTY IMPOSED

US court finds Meta violated child safety law

SAN FRANCISCO, 25 MARCH

The first jury verdict in a series of social media child safety trials this year is in — and it's not looking good for Meta. A jury in New Mexico found on Tuesday that the social media giant's platforms are harmful to children's mental health and imposed a $375 million penalty.

While the fine is a tiny fraction of Meta's $201 billion revenue in 2025, the verdict illustrates a growing shift in the public's perception of social media companies and their responsibilities in keeping young people safe on their platforms.

For years, social media companies have disputed allegations that they harm children's mental health through deliberate design choices that addict kids to their platforms and fail to protect them from sexual predators and dangerous content. This year, several state and federal court cases are heading to trial, and while the details may vary, they all seek to hold companies responsible for what happens on their platforms.

The lawsuits have come from school districts, local, state and the federal government, as well as thousands of families. The courtroom showdowns are the culmination of years of scrutiny of the platforms over child safety, and whether deliberate design choices make them addictive and serve up content that leads to depression, eating disorders or suicide.

The outcomes could challenge the companies' First Amendment shield and Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which protects tech companies from liability for material posted on their platforms. They could also be costly in the form of legal fees and settlements. And they could force the companies to change how they operate, potentially losing users and advertising dollars. *—PTI*

Anthropic challenges US Pentagon's ban in court

SAN FRANCISCO, 25 MARCH

Artificial intelligence company Anthropic is asking a federal judge on Tuesday to temporarily halt the Pentagon's "unprecedented and stigmatising" designation of the company as a supply chain risk.

A hearing scheduled for Tuesday in a California federal court marks a critical step in the feud between Anthropic and the Trump administration over how the company's AI technology could be used in war.

Anthropic sued earlier this month to stop the Trump administration from enforcing what the company calls an "unlawful campaign of retaliation" over its refusal to allow unrestricted military use of its technology.

The company is asking US District Judge Rita Lin for an emergency order that would temporarily reverse the Pentagon's decision to designate the AI company a "supply chain risk". Anthropic also seeks to undo President Donald Trump's order directing all federal employees, not just those in the military, to stop using its AI chatbot Claude. *—PTI*

-PTI

National Indoor Athletics C'ships: Reegan wins gold

CHENNAI, 25 MARCH

At the FISU World University Games in Germany last year, when Dev Meena set a personal best (PB) and a new national record (NR), the pole he used belonged to fellow Indian vaulter G. Reegan. On Wednesday, Reegan had a moment of his own. Competing on Day Two of the inaugural National Indoor Athletics Championships, the Tamil Nadu vaulter cleared 5.30m to win gold, register his personal best, and move to joint third on India's all-time list. The effort also saw him breach the Commonwealth Games qualification mark. Reegan reflected on his performance and on the episode from the World University Games, which marked his first international outing.—*PTI*

-PTI

Gurindervir wins 60m gold in national record time

BHUBANESWAR, 25 MARCH

Ace Punjab sprinter Gurindervir Singh claimed the men's 60m gold in a national record time after pre-race favourite Animesh Kujur was disqualified in a dramatic final on the concluding day of the inaugural National Indoor Athletics Championships here on Wednesday. In a fitting end to the two-day championships, the men's 60m final race lived up to the expectations, as Gurindervir, who was representing Reliance Foundation, emerged as the fastest runner of the meet. The 25-year-old Gurindervir, a former 100m outdoor national record holder, clocked 6.60 seconds to better the earlier national indoor best of 6.67 seconds—*PTI*

RCB deal nears USD 2 bn with ₹ 540 cr payout for WPL

RCSPL owns and operates the Royal Challengers Bangalore

Home Minister G Parameshwara, along with KSCA President Venkatesh Prasad and others, pays tribute to the memorial at Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, honoring the victims of the stampede. A plaque was also installed to commemorate them -*MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

The sale of cricket franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore by United Spirits Ltd (USL) almost tops a record USD 2 billion (Rs 18,776 crore), considering it also includes a Rs 540 crore payout for the Women's Premier League and a 5 per cent commission to the cricket body BCCI by the consortium of buyers, according to sources.

On Tuesday, USL, part of multinational alcoholic beverages company Diageo, announced the sale of its 100 per cent equity stake in Royal Challengers Sports Private Ltd (RCSPL) to a consortium in a Rs 16,660 crore (nearly USD 1.7 billion) all-cash deal. The acquiring consortium includes Aditya Birla Group, The Times of India Group, Bolt Ventures (a private investment platform of David Blitzer, one of the most prominent sports investors in the world), and Blackstone, the world's largest alternative asset manager.

RCSPL owns and operates the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) franchise that participates in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and Women's Premier League (WPL), it added.

"The enterprise value of the deal is close to Rs 18,000 crore, adjusted for transaction liabilities to BCCI and debt-like items. That makes it closer to a USD 2 billion valuation," a source said.

The deal is subject to customary conditions, including the receipt of all prerequisite approvals as required to give effect to the proposed transaction, including from the Competition Commission of India and the Board of Control for Cricket in India, as per the conditions set out in the Share Purchase Agreement (SPA).

RCPL's revenue was Rs 504 crore in FY25 and had contributed 1.9 per cent to the topline of Diageo India, which has brands such as Johnnie Walker, Black Dog, Black & White, VAT 69, Antiquity, Signature, The Singleton, Royal Challenge, McDowell's, Smirnoff, Tanqueray in its fold. USL expects the deal to be completed in the next six months, subject to the fulfilment of the conditions of the SPA.

"Subject to fulfilment of terms and conditions as under the SPA, the completion of the Proposed Transaction is expected to occur within 6 months from the date hereof, subject to any extension agreed in accordance with the terms of the SPA," said USL in a regulatory filing. —*PTI*

Pant should bat at No. 3: du Plessis

Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis on Wednesday said that Rishabh Pant should bat at the No. 3 position to maximise his impact, and also urged the hard-hitting wicketkeeper-batter to control his high-risk approach and aim for consistency in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL).

Pant shuffled his batting position from No. 4 to opener, and also batted lower down the order in a woeful last season. But he finally produced his best at No. 3—a 61-ball unbeaten 118 in Lucknow Super Giants' last league match. "Maybe there is an opportunity for Pant to bat at number three," said du Plessis, speaking on JioStar's 'IPL Today Live'. "The numbers suggest that for him to be the best player he can be, number three looks good. I see him batting at number three for LSG this season, with Nicholas Pooran sliding down to number four.

3-2 SERIES WIN

Connor Esterhuizen hit back-to-back half-centuries -*PTI*

Esterhuizen, bowlers lead SA to win against NZ

CHRISTCHURCH, 25 MARCH

South Africa won their first away T20I series under Shukri Conrad and their second successive bilateral series, with a convincing performance over New Zealand in Christchurch. Put in to bat, they posted the highest total of the series of 187 for 4 and defended it with a six-player attack to seal the series 3-2.

After poor batting performances in games two and three, South Africa went from good to better in matches four and five. Three of South Africa's four highest partnerships of the series came in this match, and they have unearthed a potential future star in Connor Esterhuizen. He scored back-to-back fifties in matches four and five and anchored their efforts in the decider.

While Zak Foulkes and Josh Clarkson were economical, the rest of their attack conceded at over nine runs an over. Offspinner Cole McConchie's 0 for 48 was the most expensive. New Zealand were without their first choice top five and also had to do without Tom Latham, who was due to lead them, but fractured his thumb in match three. They were never really in the chase against a disciplined South African effort. None of their batters scored more than Bevan Jacobs' 36, and they only had one partnership that threatened: 52 between Jimmy Neesham and Jacobs for the fifth wicket.

Overall, it was a messy affair on both sides, with nine dropped catches in the game, the most for any men's T20I as per ESPNCricinfo's ball-by-ball data logs since June 2018. While Hermann's promise only peeped through, Esterhuizen went from excellent to exceptional and topped up his maiden international half-century from game four with a new career-best: 75 off 33 balls in the finale.

His on-side dominance was on display, as he scored 52 runs in that half of the ground, including five of his six sixes.

The biggest ones came off McConchie who he hit back over his head, then over mid-wicket and over square leg. South Africa 187 for 4 (Esterhuizen 75, Hermann 39, Sears 2-37) beat New Zealand 154 for 8 (Jacobs 26, Coetzee 2-21, Mulder 2-28, Baartman 2-33) by 33 runs. —*PTI*

Safety measures are in place to handle extreme scenarios: FIDE

-PTI

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) on Wednesday sought to downplay security concerns surrounding the upcoming Candidates Tournament in Cyprus, insisting that safety measures and contingency plans are in place to deal with "extreme" scenarios.

Cyprus is geographically close to West Asia, which is currently in the middle of a military conflict that started with American and Israeli bombing of Iran.

The island nation endured a drone attack on a British air base that it houses earlier this month. Citing security concerns, Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy withdrew from the tournament that will decide the challenger for the men's and women's world titles. The Candidates' tournament begins this Saturday.

Cyprus is a safe country to travel to. There is no emergency, and the country continues to operate normally. All necessary measures are in place to ensure a secure, comfortable, and well-organised environment for all participants, media, and guests," the FIDE said on Wednesday, addressing concerns that have also been voiced by another prominent Candidates competitor, Hikaru Nakamura.

Nakamura, who has been in Cyprus for the past few weeks, has reported experiencing frequent power outages during his stay, which is not a good sign. FIDE said the risk of power cuts is extremely low and "overstated". "Power shortages in Cyprus are very rare and typically short-lived. For example, a recent incident, which caused outages in some areas of Cyprus on 13 March. —*PTI*

WRONG KNEE SCAN ON KYLIAN MBAPPE

LONDON, 25 MARCH

It has been reported by The Athletic that Real Madrid's medical team mistakenly performed an MRI scan on Mbappé's right knee, while the injured knee was the left one. Since the right knee was healthy, the scan showed no issues, and the Frenchman was cleared to continue playing. As the problem remained undiagnosed, Mbappé went on to feature in three more matches, worsening his condition. The mistake was only realised later when a new scan was conducted on the correct knee. By then, it was discovered that Mbappé had suffered a partial tear in the posterior ligament of his left knee.

Trailing Barcelona by four points in La Liga and preparing to face Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League, Real Madrid is making headlines across the globe for a bizarre reason. A report has shared some shocking details about the club's medical staff, putting its structure under intense scrutiny. Since these revelations surfaced, the Spanish giants have faced heavy criticism across various platforms. —*PTI*

New Zealand is ready to play Iran outside USA

NEW YORK, 25 MARCH

New Zealand's players have said that they would be willing to play Iran outside the United States of America (U.S.A) in their opening match at the FIFA World Cup 2026 as uncertainty persists over the fixture amid geopolitical tensions. Iran was one of the first nations to qualify for the finals, but its participation has been in doubt since the U.S.-Israeli conflict with the Islamic Republic broke out at the end of February. Team Melli is scheduled to play all three of their opening-round group matches in the U.S., with their 15 June opener against New Zealand in Los Angeles, but the Iranian football federation has threatened to boycott fixtures on U.S. soil. New Zealand is preparing with the thought that the Los Angeles match will go ahead.—*PTI*

AC STAGE 1: INDIAN ARCHERS CLAIM TWO BRONZE, REACH TWO FINALS

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Indian archers bagged two bronze medals and also stormed into the finals of the men's recurve and women's compound team events on the second day of the Asia Cup World Ranking Tournament Stage 1, here on Wednesday.

The women's compound team improved on its bronze from the previous edition by reaching the final.

The trio of Chikitha Taniparthi, Raj Kaur, and Tejal Salve edged past local favourites Kanyavee Maneesombatkul, Kanoknapus Kaewchomphu, and Chaniddapa Thanaratpitinan 229-226 in a closely-fought semifinal to set up a summit clash against third-seeded Kazakhstan.

However, there was some disappointment in the men's compound section, where India fielded one of their most experienced combinations. Despite topping the qualification round with Indian archers sweeping the top four spots, the team failed to defend its title and had to settle for a bronze. The trio of Rajat Chauhan, Rishabh Yadav, and Uday Kamboj squandered a strong five-point lead to lose 233-234 to Vietnam. —*PTI*

MIAMI OPEN

Sinner beats Michelsen to reach QFs

MIAMI, 25 MARCH

Jannik Sinner powered into the Miami Open quarter-finals on Tuesday, defeating unseeded American Alex Michelsen in straight sets to stay on course for the "Sunshine Double". Italian second seed Sinner, who is bidding to follow up his triumph at Indian Wells with victory in Miami, bided his time before completing a 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) win in 1hr 41min. The four-time Grand Slam champion, who will face 19th seed Frances Tiafoe in the last eight, was made to work hard by the 40th-ranked Michelsen.

After a cagey opening, Sinner began to put pressure on Michelsen's serve in the ninth game of the first set, carving out three break points. Michelsen rode out that storm, but Sinner finally broke through in the 11th game before serving out for the first set.

Michelsen hit back in the second set, breaking Sinner for a 4-2 lead before holding to go 5-2 up. Michelsen appeared to struggle with the bright late afternoon sunlight on the Hard Rock Stadium's main court, and Sinner came roaring back to force a tiebreak. Sinner sealed the win with a thumping serve that Michelsen could only return wide. —*PTI*

Muchova set up a SF against Gauff

MIAMI, 25 MARCH

Karolina Muchova needed all of her experience to hold off rising Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko 7-5, 7-6(5) on Tuesday, booking a place in her first Miami Open semifinal in a match she admitted could have gone either way.

The 29-year-old Czech secured her fifth WTA 1000 semifinal berth in a hard-fought contest that lasted one hour and 47 minutes.

"It was very close, basically one point at the end. It can always change in tennis. I'm just very grateful I was able to win the last point," Muchova said.

The opening set was a tight affair, remaining on serve until 5-4 when Muchova found herself in trouble at 0-30 before reeling off four consecutive points to level at five games all. —*PTI*

Sandhu was left out due to 'workload management': Peter

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India's trap coach Peter Wilson on Wednesday said that the country's top trap marksman Zoravar Singh Sandhu has been left out of the season-opening ISSF Shotgun World Cup due to "workload management". The 12-member Indian contingent is all set for the World Cup in Tangier, but does not include Zoravar, who became only the third Indian trap shooter to win a medal at the World Championships. En route to Tangier, Wilson, the London Olympic gold medallist, told PTI that the 46-year-old stalwart Zoravar will return to the side "hundred percent", with next year being crucial for Indian shooting as qualification for the 2028.—*PTI*

HURTING ALL HIS FANS

Salah to draw curtains on glorious Liverpool stint

BANGKOK, 25 MARCH

Liverpool star Mohamed Salah has announced that he will be leaving the English club at the end of this season. On Tuesday, the Egyptian forward announced the news that he will part ways with the club after nine glorious years.

Mohamed Salah has finally made the news, hurting all his fans at Liverpool. The star forward will not play for the English club after the 2025/26 season, the 33-year-old footballer announced on Tuesday.

Salah had joined Liverpool from Italian club Roma back in 2017 and has played 435 matches for the club so far. With a staggering 255 goals to his name, he is the club's third all-time goalscorer. While his stint at Anfield may be over, his nine years at the club have been nothing short of magical.

He lifted the Champions League trophy with the club in 2019 and won two Premier League titles with Liverpool in the 2019/20 and 2024/25 seasons.He has also won a Club World Cup, UEFA Super Cup, FA Cup, and two League Cups with the Reds. His stellar contribution to the club has earned him four Premier League Golden Boots.

Mohamed Salah took to his social media to post an emotional video and announce his departure.

The video began with a montage of his best moments on the field. The player then said. "Hello, everyone. Unfortunately, the day has come. This is the first part of my farewell. I will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season. —*PTI*

Mandaviya lauds Indian teams for winning Asian gold

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Set for an Olympic return after 100 years, the lesser-known sport of lacrosse got acknowledgement from Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday as he felicitated the Indian men's and women's teams for their gold-winning show at a recent Asian meet and urged them to eye 2028 Los Angeles Games qualification.

Lacrosse is a native American team sport in which a long-handled stick with a netted head is used to catch, pass and throw a rubber ball into the rival goal.

It made its Olympic debut as a medal event in 1904 and featured again four years later before becoming a demonstration discipline in 1928, 1932 and 1948. Eventually dropped from the roster, the sport will return to the Games in the upcoming Los Angeles edition.

"Lacrosse is an upcoming big sport for India. This was your first major international exposure, and you have already brought home medals. Now the focus should be on working harder, gaining more exposure and making the country proud. —*PTI*